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NATIONAL LOUIS UNIVERSITY

RACE FOR COMPLETION: SUCCESS COURSES COMPONENTS FOSTERING
SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY COLLEGE COMPLETION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
IN
COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERSHIP

BY
BRENDA ROLAND

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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This purpose of this research was, to identify the components of first-year first semester college success courses specifically designed to foster student success in single campus Illinois community colleges. The study provides a historical background of community colleges as it develops a context for the need for college success courses. A qualitative case study approach was used. The research conceptual framework encompassed Alexander Astin's Theory of Student Involvement (IEO), Stufflebeam's Theory of Course and Program Evaluation (CIPP), and The Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) seven key principles for student success to analyze the findings.

To generate qualitative data twenty one community colleges responded to the on-line survey. Based on maximum variation from those responses, six institutions' administrators agreed to a face-to-face semi structured interview. Eleven interview questions were matched to the four research questions, which helped in providing a comprehensive and concise overview of the research findings. As a consequent of the survey and face-to-face interview sessions findings and analysis; four emerging themes surfaced.

This study concludes, based on findings; identifying components of first-year first semester success courses can foster students' college success. The findings indicated strong support systems such as, early, before the start of the semester, orientations, introductions, and remediation, as well as, providing support services beyond the first year and as often as need throughout the college experience is perhaps the key to persistence and ultimately college completion. Implications and recommendations are presented for now and future best practices. Lastly, there is an introduction to the Roland Success Course Analysis Model.

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Education has been important in my family for as long as I can remember. As a child I can remember my grandmother reading to me every night before going to sleep. I can remember my mom continuously persecute for more education and more knowledge. My mom is my role model for all I do including earning this degree. Obtaining this degree has not been an easy task; however, it has been a fulfilling task. I have earned this degree and I am very appreciative and eternally grateful to all who helped to make it possible.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mother, who has always been the “wind beneath my wings,” my hero. Always pushing me to go further and always there to help and support my dreams. She is the one person who would give her all to me, and give her last for me.

To my soul mate, without whom, I do not think I could have finished. Your encouragement is what kept me going. When I thought I could not see the light at the end of the tunnel; you were there with a smile, a word, or a jester. Just enough light to get me back on track. The dream seemed impossible but you helped to make it work. I am grateful to have you in my life.

To my sons, relatives, and all who prayed for me; I will always be here to pray and encourage you in all your endeavors, as you were with me. Remember education is something that can never be taken from you. I encourage you to do your best and leave the rest to God.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

For the majority of students, attending community college is daunting, full of new responsibilities and experiences that can be overwhelming. Despite these responsibilities, a large percentage of full-time and part-time students do advance to their second semester or second year. To address the population of those students who might not advance, tailored interventions to assist students to understand how to succeed and therefore remain in college have become important.

The present research is an exploratory qualitative case study undertaken to understand the impetus for success courses, identify the components of these programs, and discover how and in what ways these courses are assessed and subsequently enhanced for continuous qualitative improvement. This chapter provides the following information: (a) relevant background and context of the issue; (b) purpose of the study and the guiding questions; (c) significance of the study; and (d) brief explanation the research design, which includes the methodology, data collection methods, and data analysis strategy. Also presented is a brief review of the history of community colleges relevant to the study as well as the conceptual framework of the study, which served as a basis for analysis of the collected data, leading to the research findings.

Ultimately, this dissertation illustrates and demonstrates a logical and systematic approach to the research undertaken to explore Illinois community college designated student success courses to better understand their components and identify success indicators, as well as course evaluation and assessment tools. Ultimately, it is the researcher's goal to afford the community college field evidence-based research findings to use in improving student success

courses appropriate for all those attending community colleges, leading to an increase in retention.

Background and Context of the Issue

Student success is one of the paramount issues facing higher education institutions, and community colleges are no exception. However, with an open-door admission policy involving accessibility, affordability, and service to the people from the community where the institution is located (Cohen & Brawer, 2008), the community college is faced with numerous complex issues. These difficulties and concerns for Illinois community colleges are wide in scope and include an assortment such as adequately serving a diverse student body whose ages range from 18 to 55 years and older; addressing business and industry needs for skilled employees; purchasing the technology required to teach students; and simply keeping up with the demands to do more with less local, state, and federal funding. The basic question being asked by community college leaders across the country and in Illinois is how their institutions can continue to meet their fundamental mission in this era of rapid change and increased accountability.

Community college students are accepted from all walks of life. This heterogeneous demographic includes students fresh out of high school, university transfer students, those taking only summer school courses, and those needing additional education, known as the “retoolers.” According to Bailey and Alfonso (2005), “Community colleges are designed to be open-door institutions, and they enroll a much wider variety of students than baccalaureate-granting colleges” (p. 1). Though traditional students (18 to 24 year-olds) and returning adult student are striving to meet their own academic goals, each has unique needs and often complex personal demands. A wide range of work obligations and personal responsibilities challenge enrolling students and demand their focus and time. Some of these issues include working full-time; being

a first-generation college student (often minorities and women); caring for children and other family members; being academically underprepared; and, in general, being unaware of college class requirements.

It is well known that college students enroll but often do not persist nor graduate with either a degree or a certificate. According to the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE 2010), “almost eight of 10 entering students (79%) state that their goal is to earn an associate degree, fewer than half do so” (p. 2). The same national report revealed that community colleges lose approximately half of all entering first-time, first-year students sometime prior to their second year. What is concerning is that those who would benefit from higher education the most women, Hispanics, and African Americans are those acknowledged as not continuing. This point was dramatically made by statistics that indicated an overwhelming percentage of those dropping out are the underrepresented populations (CCCSE 2012). According to Scrivener and Coghlan (2011), within 6 years of enrolling at community colleges, a large percentage of students do not graduate with a degree:

Community colleges, with their open access policy and low tuition, are an important pathway into postsecondary education for nearly half of all U.S. undergraduates. Yet only one-third of all students who enter their institutions with the intent to earn a degree or certificate actually meet this goal within six years. (Scrivener & Coghlan, 2011, p. 1)

As striking as these statistics are, they illustrate a student dropout rate problem for higher education, which has been noticed for over 40 years. Even as early as 1970, according to Roueche, former director of the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas at Austin, “only 28% of first-time, full-time, associate degree-seeking community college students graduate with a certificate or an associate degree within three years” (CCCSE 2010, p. 3). Roueche reported the belief that the percentage of degree non-completers after 6 years is even

higher than that presented by Scrivener and Coghlan. Roueche believed that only 45% of these students complete their degree in 6 years (CCCSE, 2010).

In 2015, American institutions of higher education are confronted with complex challenges unlike any encountered in the past. A wide variety of community college stakeholders have expressed concern regarding the issues of retention and completion. Something is wrong and there is a call for action to resolve this educational dilemma. The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, 2012) concurred, noting that the number of those graduating from community colleges is low and degree completion rates have been low for many years (Wilson, C.D, et al.).

When students drop out of community colleges, they no longer are in a position to complete a postsecondary degree or a certificate from that institution. Similar findings have been noticed throughout Illinois community colleges. The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB, 2008) reported that approximately 79.4% of the adjusted retention for beginners of postsecondary institutions from 2004 to 2007 did not complete degrees. The remaining 20.6% earned their degrees/certificates within the 3-year catalog period (ICCB, 2008). The, impact of the problem of increasing “degree non-completers” provides an unskilled labor market for the state and the nation and an increase in poverty or a minimal existence for individuals and their families.

Education has always been a precursor to reaching the American Dream, prosperity, and success. In the 21st century, most people understand that a postsecondary degree or certificate of some type is needed in order to be gainfully employed and support their families. “While a college degree does not guarantee employment, it nonetheless does give people an edge in joining the workforce, particularly disadvantaged individuals” (Myers, 2003, p. 3). Hinckley,

Mills, and Cotner (2011) conducted research on career pathways, particularly for the adult learner. They have found that limited skills and limited education are quickly outpaced by workplace demands, leaving degree non-completers with little to no opportunity for advancement. To keep pace with the global marketplace, businesses and industry must hire individuals who are qualified and have obtained the proper credentials specific to the field of work. The consequence for postsecondary degree or certificate non-completers is that they find themselves at the lower end of a widened earnings gap.

However, simply being aware of this fact is not enough. Tough questions are being asked by educators, accrediting bodies, and policy makers throughout the United States regarding the cause of this postsecondary educational failure. Why are individuals enrolled at community colleges not graduating with a 2-year degree or credential? Is it because the K-12 education system is graduating underprepared students, a mismatch of learning styles and teaching styles in community colleges, or poor and inadequate learning skills of the students themselves that is perpetuating degree non-completers?

Pressure has been placed on all postsecondary institutions to increase student completion rates. President Obama, in his address to the Joint Session of Congress on February 24, 2009, set a new challenge for all community colleges, 4-year colleges, and universities. He stated that once America had ranked Number 1 in college completions, but as of 2009, America is ranked 16th worldwide (Obama, 2009). He urged Americans and those in higher education to improve the graduation rate of those attending colleges and universities. He stated that “America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world” (Obama, 2009, p. 5). In his speech, Obama said that 75% of the fastest growing occupations require more than a high school diploma and yet only 50% of the citizens have any postsecondary education. He stressed that to

be competitive in the global marketplace; Americans need to complete a minimum of 1 year or more of higher education or career training (Obama, 2009).

President Obama's clarion call came at a time when community colleges are experiencing an all-time high in non-completion rates. If community colleges can respond well to President Obama's call and increase their degree and certificate completion numbers, it is possible that workforce trends could advance, which would assist in improving the U.S. economy and provide individuals with a good wage. The AACC (2012) concurred, stating, "If this nation can add 20 million postsecondary-educated workers to its workforce over the next 15 years, income inequality will decline substantially" (p. 8). The challenge for community colleges is how to assist students to improve their chances of success. Community colleges must identify and implement strategies to successfully retain students and assist them in reaching their academic goal and complete a degree and/or certificate.

Since their inception more than 100 years ago, community colleges have played a pivotal role in the success of the nation by providing education and training for anyone and everyone. Scrivener and Coghlan (2011) suggested that the main reason for the low completion rate is because many beginners of postsecondary education programs are unprepared for college level work. Underprepared students typically drop out in the first year and often in the first semester of college. Fike and Fike (2008), professors at Texas Tech University and University of Incarnate Word, agreed and discovered in their research of underprepared students that "on the average approximately 41% of underprepared students tend to drop out in the first year of college" (p. 68). Consequently, community college freshman success courses such as pre-intervention programs are a necessary tool to contribute to students' success and assist them to accomplish their academic goals. By intervening during a student's first semester, success courses are

designed to acclimate and prepare students for the challenges of attending college. However, what is not known about these courses is what common elements are useful to students and what are not. In essence, little research has been done regarding the delivery, the beneficial content, and the assessment strategies to improve these types of programs

The CCCSE (2009) stated that “current research indicates that helping students succeed through the equivalent of the first-semester can dramatically improve subsequent success” (p. 4). There is much research (e.g., Astin, 1999; CCCSE 2012; Pascarella, 1985; Rendón, 2002; Tinto, 1993, 2006), which indicates that early student involvement with faculty, the college environment, both internal and external activities, and available student support services will increase the likelihood of successful completion. There exists a general belief that as a result of being engaged, validated, and nurtured, students appear to be increasingly prepared and encouraged to complete course work and are able to earn certificates and/or degrees. Tinto (1993), Pascarella (1982), Astin (1999), and Rendón (1994), all did research on the topic of student success and came to a similar conclusion: student involvement is crucial and does indeed perpetuate a successful college experience, which more often than not leads to degree completion.

The idea of early student involvement increasing the likelihood of successful completion is acknowledged by many community college leaders. Across the nation, community colleges are offering more supportive services in an attempt to provide students with a helpful environment that promotes degree completion. According to Ashford (2011), “community colleges are increasingly giving students more personal attention through special classes, learning communities and financial aid counseling to improve student success rates” (p. 2). However, no research has been done in Illinois community colleges regarding how elements of success

courses were designed, implemented, or evaluated for continuous quality improvement.

Therefore, there is a gap in the literature regarding what are the components of student success courses in Illinois community colleges.

The purpose of this study is to explore and identify components of success courses in Illinois community colleges. This information is necessary to assist community colleges in improving the effectiveness of existing student success courses and to provide an evidence-based model for student success courses.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify the components of first-year first-semester college success courses specifically designed to foster student success in single-campus Illinois community colleges.

Research and Guiding Questions

The guiding questions for the study were:

1. What catalysts are instrumental in the implementation of the college success course instituted by the college?
2. How are the overall design and the components of the college success course selected?
3. How and in what way do the college success courses maintain quality and validity?
4. How is the impact of the college success course evaluated and demonstrated?

Significance of the Study

As stated by Abdul-Alim (2010), a journalist and blogger, 63% of the jobs in the United States will require some postsecondary education and/or training by 2018. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation supported this number and added that colleges are predicted to fall short of

preparing the 22 million needed to fill the gap by 3 million. However, according to Kelly and Strawn (2011), more than 2/3 of the jobs in the United States already require some type of postsecondary education. Therefore, it is vital that people have the opportunity to gain the postsecondary education specifically relevant to their goals, profession, or occupation. One avenue for individuals to acquire postsecondary certificates and degrees is by attending and graduating from community colleges.

With the economic downturn that began in the first decade of the 21st century, many individuals began returning to college to retool their skills, change professions, or to simply begin their college careers at their community college. The demographics of these individuals enrolled at community colleges are extremely diverse, ranging from the new high school graduate to those who have been out of secondary school for 10–20 years or more. They come with an enormous variety of experiences, skills, and knowledge, yet with the same objective in mind: to successfully take and pass courses.

One of the issues facing community colleges today is how to assist this diverse breadth of individuals enrolling in their programs and courses to graduate. A majority of community colleges have developed and implemented college success courses. However, what is not known are the factors or elements in these types of courses. What could be of benefit to many community colleges is an understanding of the components of success courses and how successful the coordinators believe they are in assisting first-time first-semester students to persist and complete their academic programs or courses.

This research explores community colleges success courses in order to better understand their design and to examine how these courses maintain their quality and applicability. What is currently known about community college success courses is that they are all different. What is

not known is what are the common factors of these courses, what is working, and how are they assessed. The insights based on data collected from this qualitative exploratory study can be useful to all community colleges as they strive to better assist the success of their students. In addition, findings from this research will assist in creating a model that can be employed by community colleges to improve existing success courses.

Conceptual Framework

The literature review prepared for this study represents an opportunity to view from a contextual lens the concepts and theories that framed the research and are used to analyze the findings. Concepts and theories have been carefully selected to serve as a broad lens to view this research purpose and contribute to better understanding of the components and improvement of community college student success courses. Serving as the conceptual framework for the study are the following concepts and theory: (a) CCCSE (2012) seven success principles is used to assist in exploring and identifying the existing success factors in Illinois single-campus community colleges; (b) Stufflebeam's (1966, 1994), four steps of program evaluation (CIPP), which serves as a model for the evaluation of existing success courses in Illinois single-campus community colleges; and (c) Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement, which serves as a vehicle to discuss the importance of student involvement in their successful college completion and the effect of CCCSE seven Principles on students' involvement.

Center for Community College Student Engagement

The CCCSE is part of the Community Colleges Leadership Program at the University of Texas at Austin. CCCSE has endeavored to improve the educational outcomes for students since 2001. Individuals involved with CCCSE expounded that because of policy changes at state and federal levels, it is vital to stay focused on the goal of improving the number of college

completers. This goal can only be realized with the concerted efforts of all actors involved: the students, faculty, staff, and administrations. Research supported by the CCCSE evaluated several colleges and universities nationwide regarding supporting student success courses and the findings resulted in seven critical design principles for student success.

According to CCCSE (2012), “community colleges across the country have created innovative, data-informed programs that are models for educating underserved students, engaging traditionally underserved students and helping students from all backgrounds to succeed” (p. 2). Findings from CCCSE (2012) resulted in the following seven critical design principles for student success: (a) a strong start; (b) clear, coherent pathways; (c) high expectations and high support; (d) integrated support; (e) intensive student engagement; (f) design scale; and (g) professional development. CCCSE findings are designed to focus on increasing the number of institutional completers through effective design of student success courses. Assisting these types of courses to remain effective and maintain their efficiency requires periodic program evaluations that must be conducted in order to attain continuous quality improvement.

Stufflebeam’s Evaluation Model (CIPP)

Fundamentally, program evaluation can be understood as “a purposeful systematic and careful collection and analysis of information used for the purpose of documenting the effectiveness and impact of programs establishing accountability and identifying areas needing change and improvement” (Wall, 1994, p. 1). Several common program evaluation methods include process evaluation, output measures, outcome evaluations, and impact evaluation (Partnership for Prevention, 2002). The specific design of a program such as student success courses can be assessed using the perspectives of all of these common evaluation methods. It is

the reason or purpose for the evaluation that designates the type of evaluation method most appropriate to be employed. This research encompassed a process program evaluation. Findings from the study will provide information on the process of designing, implementing, and assessing current student success courses because these elements are the significant program components that which have a major impact on usefulness of the success program for students. To continue to achieve the desired outcome, assessment feedback must consistently be gathered by appropriate methods to enable necessary quality improvement measures to be implemented.

This qualitative research evaluated these success courses in selected Illinois community colleges through the lens of Stufflebeam's (2002) evaluation model. Stufflebeam presented four components of program evaluation: context, input, process, and product (CIPP). Stufflebeam, a professor at Western Michigan University, first introduced the CIPP model in late 1960s. The 2002 version represents the fifth iteration of the CIPP model, and each model has built on the previous models, consequently preserving the integrity and relevance throughout each iteration. Stufflebeam's model stresses the need for process, as well as product evaluations. This fifth iteration of the CIPP model organizes product evaluation into the four noted components of program evaluations. Stufflebeam's framework was developed to provide a relationship between evaluations and program decision making. Stufflebeam's construct provides an analytical and rational reason for program planning, structuring, implementing, reviewing, and revising. Reviewing success courses in selected Illinois community colleges through the lens and framework of Stufflebeam's CIPP theory of evaluation yielded relevant insights and perspectives from programs directors and provided specific knowledge of which components are valuable, which are marginally useful, and how these programs are evaluated.

In Stufflebeam's (2002) model of program evaluation, CIPP is an acronym for the components of the evaluation. The *C* designates context evaluation, representing program planning and providing a purpose, rationale, and objectives for the program. In other words, the context looks at the specific program goals. The "*I*" designates input evaluation and involves a rigorous look at how success courses are structured. The input evaluation is where the course strategies, procedure, and activities are evaluated. Stufflebeam's first "*P*" in the CIPP model represents process evaluation. In the process evaluation, the activities and procedures of the course are reviewed with a perspective toward necessary modifications and improvements. The final "*P*" in the CIPP model represents the product. Product evaluation provides an assessment of the measurable attainments of the course with regard to the set goals and objectives. Evaluation implies determining value and worth, often involving comparisons to other similar programs, curricula, or organizational schemes. Process program evaluation is a focus of this research.

Stufflebeam's (2002) CIPP model takes into account both formative and summative evaluation. Formative evaluation is the ongoing examination of the delivery of the program and on such elements as personnel, procedures, and technology to better understand the internal workings with a focus toward improvement. The formative phase of evaluation is composed of Stufflebeam's context, input, and process. In contrast, summative evaluation examines the effect or outcomes of the courses. This phase corresponds to Stufflebeam's final "*P*", the product evaluation.

Astin's Theory of Student Involvement

Many researchers have written on the implications of student involvement on student success, such as Rendón (1994, 2002), Pascarella (1982, 1995, 2005), Terenzini (2005), and

Tinto (1993, 2006). Rendón's involvement theory suggests that rather than using their own initiative, nontraditional students will not become involved unless there is an invitation to become involved. Pascarella's (2005) model is more general in scope. It indicates that a student's effort in being academically successful is dependent upon the quality of effort put forward by the student, as well as the student's background and socialization. Terenzini suggested student academic outcomes are influenced by the student's precollege traits, which in turn, are effected by institutional context (curricular patterns, classroom experiences, and out-of-class experiences). Tinto's (2006) model regarding what influences postsecondary education student success presents five core concepts: pre-entry attributes, goals/commitments, institutional experiences, integration, and outcomes. Although others have written on the subject of student involvement, the lens for this research uses Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement.

One of the most high-impact components of student success courses is student involvement. When students are involved in success courses, they have an enhanced chance at remaining in college longer, graduating, and reaching their academic goals. Although Astin (1999) developed this theory in 1984, it still is relevant for study in 2012. Astin's theory of student involvement is based on the assumption that student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is a direct result of the quality and quantity of the student's involvement in that program.

The core components of Astin's (1999) student involvement theory coalesce around the concepts of input, environment, and outcomes, known as IEO. Astin saw his IEO as a mediating mechanism that explains education and how it translates into student achievement. The components of Astin's involvement theory are the following:

- input: student demographics, backgrounds and prior experiences;

- environment: what are the encounters during the college experience; and
- outcomes; characteristics, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, values, etc. that exists as a result of the individual student's college experience.

The more time and effort of physical and psychological energy is expended in success courses by students, the greater the likelihood of retention and completion. Astin (1999) theorized that students must be actively involved in their own learning process to achieve their goals. Student involvement theory purports that learning must be relevant and engage the learner. Astin described three important areas of involvement that are essential for student success: academic involvement, student-faculty involvement, and peer involvement. Figure 1 illustrates Astin's three elements importance to student success enrolled in community colleges.

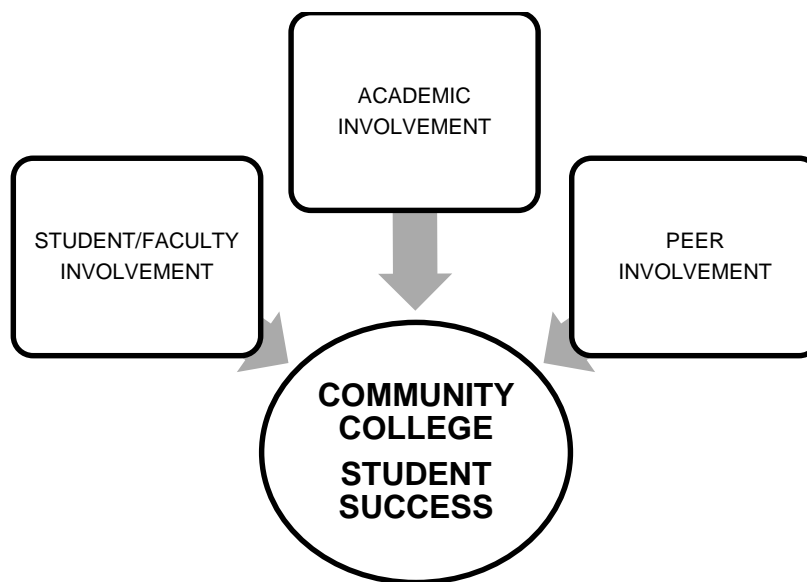


Figure 1. Astin's three elements to student success.

Therefore, the CCCSE (2012) seven principles for success, Stufflebeam's (2002) CIPP theory of evaluation, and Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement form the conceptual framework for this case study. The conceptual framework of the study will serve as the lens to analyze the data and information gathered, allowing for the exploration and identification of

factors in college success courses and courses specifically designed to foster success for those enrolled in community colleges.

Methodology

This research was conducted as a program evaluation study. This study identifies the components of success courses and evaluates them for effectiveness and impact for future use and design. The research methodology for this research is derived from the purpose. For validity and trustworthiness, it is important that all aspects of this research be explained. The methodology delineated includes (a) research design, (b) data collection, (c) site and participant selections, (d) data collection methods, (e) data analysis process.

Research Design: Case Study Methodology

A case study was selected as the most appropriate methodology for this study because it provides the opportunity to explore a little-known phenomenon holistically and from the context of a variety of perspectives. A case study approach explicitly bounds or set the parameters of the study. Typically, bounded systems are determined by the researcher, enabling the study to be situated within a specified context (Creswell, 2008). It allows for the delineation of what is in the study and what falls outside of it purview. This case study provides an opportunity to present a more detailed and in-depth understanding of what are the elements of student success courses at selected Illinois community colleges in an attempt to identify the commonalities as well as those elements that are noted to be particularly helpful to students.

According to Yin (2003), a case study is, “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially, when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). Yin (2003) categorized case studies as (a) explanatory, “which casually links in real-life interventions that are too complex for the

survey or experimental strategies” (p. 15); (b) descriptive; describing an invention or phenomenon in real-life context in which it occurs; or (c) exploratory; exploring situations in which the intervention being evaluated have no clear single set of outcomes. Stake (1995) agreed with Yin’s three categories of case study, although the category titles are somewhat different. Stake’s intrinsic case category goal is to achieve a comprehensive understanding, thus corresponding with Yin’s descriptive category. Stake’s instrumental category goal is defined as focusing on a wide phenomenon in order to obtain a better understanding, thus corresponds to both Yin’s exploratory and explanatory categories.

Utilization of a case study methodology also incorporates an encompassing design with specific elements to address and answer the research purpose. According to Yin (2003), to strengthen validity of the logical design of a case study, the research must incorporate five major features: (a) the research questions, (b) the research propositions, (c) its unit(s) and analysis, (d) the logic linking data collected to the research proposition, and (e) the criteria for interpreting the research findings. In keeping with Yin’s five features, this research is a case study bound by the purpose of the study, driving questions, participants, geographic location of the community colleges. and uses the *a priori* themes of the conceptual framework to analyze the data obtained.

The case study method of research allows for collection of sufficient amounts of data for a rich and robust analysis of occurring themes and patterns. Moreover, the rigor of a case study also presents transparency of each element, providing an audit trail of decisions made by the researcher. Elements of success courses that are perceived as most helpful to community college students and that possibly lead to an increase in retention rates can be and were, in this study, identified from various perspectives. Care was taken to ensure the transparency of the data and

information collected, the analysis process leading to the findings, providing useful information for developing or improving college student success courses.

Data Collection

Sampling

Purposeful sampling was used to obtain the most relevant data to address the study purpose. In general, purposeful sampling is designed to be investigative and has a goal to increase knowledge and provide understanding and insights into a phenomenon. To accomplish this task, individuals who have specific insights, perspectives, and experiences relevant to the research topic must be selected in order to capture appropriate rich, thick data and information for analysis. Creswell (2007) stated that purposeful sampling is a means whereby, “the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 125). Merriam (2009) echoed Creswell’s explanation of purposeful sampling, saying, “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 77).

In addition to conducting purposeful sampling, maximum variation, another sampling technique characteristic of qualitative research, was employed. Maximum variation, as explained by Creswell (2008), “is a purposeful sampling strategy in which the research samples cases or individuals that differ on some characteristic or trait” (p. 214). Maximum variations identify and utilize those with the widest and most varied characteristics of interest for the research (Merriam, 2009). For maximum variation in this research study, six Illinois single campus community college administrators who have direct oversight of student success courses were invited to participate in face-to-face interviews. It is logical to assume that information, data, and

perspectives vary depending on the sites and participants selected. Therefore, to obtain the widest possible perspectives and understanding in exploring the elements of a quality student success course, a diverse number of sites and participants which met specific selection criteria were needed.

Site Selection

Community colleges across the nation are grappling with what to do to increase student completion rates. Illinois community colleges are no different and have instituted success courses to aid in facilitation of student completion rates. Illinois has 48 community colleges, composed of two community college systems (seven city community colleges and four Illinois eastern community colleges) and 37 single-campus community colleges. However, because of the differences in administrative structures in community college systems relative to those of single-campus community colleges and to address the purpose of the study, only single-campus community colleges formed the study sample pool. Therefore, 37 Illinois community colleges were included in the initial survey to gather pertinent data and information to address the research purpose.

For maximum variations, six Illinois single-campus community colleges were selected to present their perspectives. These Illinois sites were selected from rural, suburban, and metropolitan urban geographic locations with a diverse number of annual student full-time-equivalent enrollments. In addition, care was taken to have representation of the community college sites in six of the seven ICCB peer institution groups. One peer group was not eligible because it consists entirely of the seven colleges in the Chicago city college system. The ICCB (2011) seven peer groups are based on a combination of factors: college enrollment (per semester), geographic location, and financial data.

Each site provided a unique perspective for consideration, thus offering more rich and robust findings. Maximum variation is ideal for qualitative research because, “When a researcher maximizes differences at the beginning of the study, it increases the likelihood that the findings will reflect differences or different perspectives” (Creswell, 2007, p. 126).

Participant Selection

Qualitative researchers recognize that some individuals, because of their involvement with the research topic, are more experienced than others and are more likely to provide better insight and understanding of the phenomenon under study. Those who have direct oversight of community college success courses were most appropriate individuals to provide the greatest insights pertinent for this study. These administrators were the vice presidents of student affairs, deans, and or program directors. Therefore, from the initial survey sent to 37 single-campus Illinois community colleges, those administrators who have oversight of these programs were invited to participate in a face-to-face interview. Six community college administrators, one from each of the six eligible ICCB peer groups who agreed to be interviewed represented a diverse participant pool based on geographic location, size, and student population. In addition, they must have had a minimum of 2 years of direct oversight in order to truly understand the research topic.

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative research calls for extensive collection of data and information, typically from multiple data sources. Creswell (2007) stated that data collection is “the backbone” (p. 43) of qualitative research. Given that multiple sources of data assist in building a more robust and in-depth experience, this research employed four methods of data collection: (a) survey, (b) semi-structured interviews, (c) document reviews, and (d) field notes.

Surveys

Surveys were used to collect basic demographic information from study participants to assist in forming a contextual background or picture. In addition, other simple questions on the survey pertinent to the purpose were used to obtain data and information. The initial survey was sent to the college success course administrators of all 37 single-campus community colleges via the web-based tool, Google Surveys. This web-based tool is widely used, extremely user-friendly, supports data integrity with secure limited access and storage, and allows for the ease of analysis of the data. A question on the survey invited participants to take part in a face-to-face interview.

This survey was specifically designed as a multiple-method sequential data collection tool. Sequential data collection is characterized by an initial phase of data collection and analysis followed, by a second phase of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2008). The first set of collected data affects and guides the collection of the second set of data. Yin (2003) concurred that a multiple-method approach is essential when the large study encompasses the case study, such as seen in this study. Therefore, the survey was useful for identifying the community college success course administrators who agreed to participate in the second phase of the data collection. The survey questionnaire is presented in Appendix A.

Semi-structured Interview

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were the primary data collection tool for this study. As a result of the survey identification of success course administrators, the first individuals who agreed to be interviewed and whose institution met the peer group selection criteria were invited to participate in the study. In semi-structured interviews, all questions asked of the participants are identical for consistency because the interviewer is attempting to ascertain

specific information from all respondents (Merriam, 2009). Participant interview questions are presented in Appendix B.

Semi-structured interviews also provided the interviewer latitude to follow up with additional probing questions pertinent to each participant, thus allowing for clarification of answers given as necessary. Merriam (2009) provided a discussion regarding the use of semi-structured interviews, which can be summarized by the following characteristics: (a) flexible questions, (b) question to gather required specific information, and (c) all questions are issued as a guide for all participants. The interview questions mapped to the driving research questions are provided in Appendix B. Prior to the interview, an explanation of the study and the participants' role and rights in the form of informed consent was provided to the participants. The participant consent form is presented in Appendix C.

Document Reviews

A third method of data collection was review of documents. Documents relevant to community college success courses were obtained from the participants. Merriam (2009) stated that these "documents include just about anything in existence prior to the research at hand" (p. 148). The review of documents can be useful in confirming dates, places, times, and names or titles of individuals' involvement and the elements or components of the success course at the institution. Documents included brochures, success course syllabus, organizational charts, meeting minutes, college and student services websites, and any other relevant documentation pertaining to the development and implementation of the success course.

Field Notes

Lastly, field notes, both observational sometimes called descriptive and reflective, were made as a part of this research. Creswell (2008) explained descriptive field notes as recording "a

description of the events, activities, and people (what happen)” (p. 225) and viewed reflective notes as allow for a “record of personal thoughts that researchers have that relate to their insight, hunches, or broad ideas or themes that emerge during the observation” (p. 225). Field notes, in particular, are intended to record notes, data, and thoughts of the researcher immediately after an interview. This immediacy is important so as not to lose any important feelings, gestures, reactions, or otherwise interpretations the researcher gleans from the face-to-face interview. Field notes are useful when completing data analysis because they assist the researcher in remembering and recalling the context of questions, as well as both physical and verbal reactions to certain questions.

Data Analysis

The data gathered in this exploratory qualitative case study was analyzed by *a priori* themes found in the concept framework. A rich and robust analysis of the data through the lens of the Astin’s (1999) student involvement theory, CCCSE’s (2012) success components, and Stufflebeam’s (2002) evaluation process ensued. The *a priori* themes found in Astin’s student involvement theory are input, environment, and outcome. The *a priori* themes from the CCCSE success components are (a) a strong start; (b) clear, coherent pathways; (c) high expectations and high support; (d) integrated support; (e) intensive student engagement; (f) design scale; and (g) professional development. Lastly, the four *a priori* themes of Stufflebeam’s program evaluation are (a) context, (b) input, (c) process, and (d) product. Although there was a focus on analyzing data using these themes, great care was taken to recognize and capture any and all emergent themes.

It is crucial in qualitative research that data analysis be systemic and logical. Data analysis involves an iterative, spiraling, or cyclical process that starts from the first data gathered

until the last theme and pattern has been uncovered. In this study, data and information obtained from surveys, interviews, and documents were reviewed, coded, and analyzed for patterns, commonalities, and/or differences.

Creswell's (2007) data analysis framework was used to assist with data analysis for this study to maintain trustworthiness of the study. The four steps of Creswell's data analysis framework include (a) data managing, which consists of cleaning the data, organizing the data, and files; (b) reading the data and memoing, which allows for reading the context of the research, reflecting, and writing notes from initials codes; (c) describing, classifying, and interpreting the data, which guides the uncovering of themes and patterns; and (d) representing visualizing helping by using tables and figures to aggregate themes and patterns.

Summary

Research is an important process that helps to identify existing issues and emerging issues within community colleges. This chapter provided an overview into what the reader can anticipate from this study in the upcoming chapters. Ultimately, Chapter 1 provided the context of the research issue. It introduced the purpose and significance of the study, as well as presented the conceptual framework. The research was viewed from the lens of Astin's (1999) student involvement theory, Stufflebeam's (2002) course and program evaluation theory, and the CCCSE (2012) seven principles for student success. In addition, this chapter acquainted the reader with the research design: qualitative inquiry using a case study methodology. Furthermore, the chapter discussed the data collection methods, which involved a sequential multiple-method design. In summation, Chapter 1 answered germane questions concerning this research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter examines the literature that is associated with identifying the components of first-year first-semester college success course(s). Many community colleges are attempting to develop student success courses. Despite their efforts, little research exist regarding what exact components are most successful. Therefore, a gap in the community college literature must be acknowledged.

Institutions are struggling to discover if their current success course(s) and courses are effective or how to make them better and more applicable for students to enhance their prospects of becoming college completers. Because the issue of student success is exceedingly complex, a wide variety of student success courses have been established in Illinois community colleges. However, fundamental to this study was the exploration of how and in what ways these courses are successful.

Community colleges aspire to establish and/or improve on existing programs in an effort to incorporate the most effective components of student success courses. In order to accomplish the task, leadership first needs to consider the following four thoughts concerning success courses: (a) how they are designed, (b) what program components work well and what materials are lacking; (c) how these courses can be evaluated; and (d) how evaluation findings can be used to make decisions for program or course improvement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the components of first-year first-semester college success course(s) specifically designed to foster student success in single-campus Illinois community colleges. Ultimately, effective components of student success courses will increase

graduation numbers and will position the United States back in first place for the total number of college graduates worldwide, while having a positive impact on the workforce population.

The literature review provides a context for this research through a historical perspective and explores a variety of relevant literature associated with the purpose. This literature review offers and discusses (a) the historical overview and context of community colleges, (b) issues, initiatives addressing community college completions rates, (c) concepts and components of community college student success courses, and (d) the theories and concepts serving as the conceptual framework for this research. To examine the complexity of student success courses that foster success, a more encompassing conceptual framework for the study was needed. Therefore, the conceptual framework consisted of one concept and two theories.

The concept for the conceptual framework was the CCCSE (2012) seven principles for student success. This concept was selected because of the record of this organization in collecting and maintaining community college data and utilization of those data for the development of student success. These seven principles articulated by CCCSE emphasize the influence of student engagement on students' completion rates.

The first theory is a model for student success that was first presented in 1985 and yet remains relevant today: Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement. This theory hinges on three elements of student involvement: input, environment, and output, or IEO. Astin theorized that all life experiences will influence student outcomes. Astin's theory provides a model of total involvement as being essential in the dynamics for student success.

Finally, the second theory was Stufflebeam's (2002) theory of evaluation context, input, process, and product, or CIPP. CIPP theory assists by analyzing data gathered to execute course improvement. Stufflebeam's theory is relevant because it provided an organized structure that

could be used to determine strengths, weakness, and effectiveness of success courses. To glean this information, evaluation of these courses was required. Therefore, it is important and appropriate to present a holistic view of the concepts of evaluation. Stufflebeam's theory of evaluation allowed for a holistic presentation view of course(s) evaluation, which is crucial to understanding the most effective components of success courses. CIPP theory assisted by analyzing data gathered to execute course improvement.

Historic Overview and Context of Community Colleges

Early Development and Expansion

The U.S. junior college system is an institution that has been in existence for more than 100 years. The original focus provided a 2-year college education and lower division classes for freshmen and sophomores. According to community college historians Cohen and Brawer (2008), junior colleges emerged during the early 1900s as a result of a growing faction of educators who did not want to teach adolescents in 4-year institutions. The prevailing opinion was that universities could not concentrate on the higher education of students while providing preparatory or lower division classes. As Cohen and Brawer (2008) explained, "Several prominent nineteenth-and early-twentieth-century educators wanted the universities to abandon their freshman and sophomore classes and relegate the function of teaching adolescents to a new set of institutions, to be called junior colleges" (p. 7). At this same time throughout the United States, the number of high school graduates was increasing and more people wanted the opportunity to attend college.

Consequently, in 1901, the first junior college was established in the United States: Joliet Junior College. Joliet Junior College was a concept conceived by Harper, president of the University of Chicago, and Brown, the superintendent of the Joliet Township High School. The

primary mission of the junior college was to provide a liberal arts curriculum for freshmen and sophomores, which would better position them for transferring into 4-year institutions. In addition, junior colleges cost less, which made it more affordable and enabled students to save for the costly tuition charged by universities. Junior colleges were also becoming accessible, allowing students to attend college while remaining home or near their communities.

In the early 1920s and 1930s, as the number of junior colleges across the United States grew, there came an outcry from the workforce sector declaring that junior colleges should focus more on vocational programs. Vocational programs would prepare prospective students for semiprofessional occupations after completing junior college. Even though during this period, a large number of vocational job training programs were delivered via apprenticeships. Nevertheless, because of the economic and political pressures, the vision of vocational programs in community colleges was realized in the 1930s (Bragg & Townsend, 2006).

From the 1940s through 1960s, three major socioeconomic issues provided the impetus for the expansion and growth of junior colleges in the United States. These three issues were the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, better known the GI Bill; the 1947 President's Commission on Higher Education for Democracy, also known as the Truman Commission; and the Higher Education Act of 1965. Each had a tremendous impact on the continued growth of junior colleges through the influences of enrollments of returning veterans, and the increase of the diversity of student populations in junior colleges as a whole.

The GI Bill

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, better known the GI Bill, was signed into law by President Roosevelt in June of 1944. At the end of World War II, veterans were returning home and trying to resume their lives. After World War II, jobs that were once held by the

returning veterans, for the most part, had substantively changed; they were obsolete or no longer existed. This large influx of returning veterans had the potential of creating a very unstable U.S. economy, which needed to be addressed immediately so as not to cause another economic depression. Concurrently during this period, the United States was in the midst of the growing manufacturing era, accompanied by an expansive wave of building and growth across the country. There was a great need for trained employees to fill new positions and operate manufacturing equipment of all types. Therefore, in the effort to create and to keep the economy stable, and to keep the veterans out of the unemployment lines, President Roosevelt signed the GI Bill.

The GI Bill provided veterans with six benefits to aid them as they returned from the war. The first three benefits were the most significant. Those three benefits included financial assistance for a college education and/or vocational training, guaranteed loans for purchasing homes or farms, and guaranteed loans to assist with starting or purchasing business. “The empowerment of the individual veteran by the G.I. Bill helped to create the expectation that all Americans can and must have an opportunity to share in the dreams of college education and a successful, middle-class lifestyle” (Verstegen & Wilson, 2008, p. 2).

As a result of the GI Bill benefits, veterans were entering junior colleges in large numbers. Coinciding with this influx of students and demand for services during the late 1940s and early 1950s was the first push to build more junior colleges. To address the increasing number of students interested in attending junior colleges, more than 650 junior colleges opened at this time. The building of junior colleges in local communities provided avenues for these institutions to establish themselves within the life of the communities in which they were located. By 1956, approximately eight million returning World War II veterans had taken

advantage of the GI Bill benefits, which not only had an impact on the expansion and growth of junior colleges, but also had an impact on the U.S. economy, politics, and society as a whole.

The GI Bill made it possible for veterans from all walks of life to pursue a college education or acquire some type of vocational training. The fundamental premise of the GI Bill was the belief that education, life, liberty, and equality was open and accessible to all, regardless of age, race, sex, or religion (Greenburg, 2008). This ideology gave birth to the beginning of the democratization of education in America.

Truman Commission on Higher Education

The second important occurrence that supported the continued expansion and growth of community colleges was the establishment of the President's Commission on Higher Education. In 1947, President Truman established the commission as a task force to review higher education in the United States, including its objectives, methods, and its role in educating a democratic society, as well as to make recommendation for improvements. According to the presidential document archives, President Truman stated,

Higher education in our Nation is confronted today with tremendous responsibilities. Colleges and universities are burden by great overcrowding and a shortage of teachers. Most importantly, however, we are challenged by the need to insure that higher education shall take its proper place in our effort to strengthen democracy at home to improve our understanding of our friends and neighbors everywhere in the world. It was for these compelling reasons that I asked this Commission to report to me and to the Nation. (Harry S. Truman: 235-Statement by the President Making Public a Report of the Commission on Higher Education, December 15, 1947)

The Truman Commission report redefined American higher education. It was during this period that junior colleges began to change their name to community colleges. The report recommendations were extensive and gave undisputable support to community colleges. The Truman Commission Report "made a bold statement in support of junior colleges as critical to expanding access to higher education for America's citizens" (Townsend & Bragg, 2006, p. 2),

advocating for equal opportunities for all to the maximum extent of their abilities regardless of economic status, race, creed, color, sex, or national origin.

With regard to higher education, the Truman Commission made recommendations in three key areas: (a) improving access and equity to colleges and universities, (b) expanding the role of community colleges, and (c) restructuring and expanding the role of the federal government in funding higher education institutions. The report prepared by the commission acknowledged that existing institutions could not adequately be enlarged to meet the growing educational needs of the nation. This statement led to the call for creation of a large number of 2-year colleges throughout the country. It was this report that recognized 2-year higher education institutions primarily serve the educational needs of the local community, which in turn advocated the classification change from junior college to community college.

As a result of the Truman Commission, community colleges continued to thrive, with the enrollments doubling between 1944 and 1947. The outcome of the recommendations was the inherent mission of the community college that centers on open access and affordability for the adult population (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). The report paved the way for the Higher Act of 1965 and higher education as we know it today.

The Higher Education Act

The third occurrence that had a major impact on the expansion and growth of community colleges was the Higher Education Act of 1965. The Higher Education Act of 1965 was signed into law on November 8, 1965, as part of President Johnson's domestic agenda. Whereas the cost to attend college was still prohibitive for many lower and middle class citizens, the Higher Education Act increased federal money given to universities, created scholarships, gave low-interest loans for students, and established a National Teachers Corps. The Higher Education Act

provided federal financial aid through a guaranteed student loan under Title IV of the act. The guaranteed student loan made it possible for individuals to attend college who otherwise may never have been able to afford a college education. Consequently, this guaranteed loan program allowed more individuals (minorities, women, and immigrants) to participate in a college education, resulting in a more diverse student population. It was also during this period that community college student attendance was changing from being primarily full-time to part-time. Community colleges accommodated this trend and became primary commuter colleges to better meet the needs of students (Cohen & Brawer, 2008), also contributing to the building expansion of community colleges across the country.

According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC 2013), there are 1,132 community colleges in the United States. The largest growth in number of community colleges occurred between 1960 and late 1970s, when the number of community colleges doubled. Table 1 shows the growth of community colleges throughout the 1900s.

Table 1. Community College Growth

Years	Total	Public	Private
1900–1930	436	178	258
1931–1948	650	328	322
1951–1969	993	739	254
1970–1980	1,231	1,049	182
1981–2000	1,220	1,076	144
2001–2005	1,173	1,061	112

Note. Adapted from *The American Community College*, by A. M. Cohen & F. B. Brawer, 2008, p. 17. Copyright 2008 by Jossey-Bass.

With this growth of community colleges, enrollment increased from approximately 70,000 in 1930 to approximately 2.2 million in 1970 (Cohen & Brawer, 2008) and to over 13 million by 2012 (AACC, 2012). The impact of the Higher Education Act of 1965 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 combined and “improved the lives of students in a number of ways, not least

of which was financial support unparalleled in the nation's history" (McClellan & Stringer, 2009, p. 13), thus making college more affordable and accessible for students. This added support resulted in an increase in the diversity of individuals attending college and obtaining a college education to provide a better life for themselves and their families. Since the inception of these three federal mandates (the GI Bill, Truman Commission, and the Higher Education Act), community colleges have become a vehicle whereby education and training has made it possible to improve the lives of residents living in the community college district.

Community Colleges Today

The mission of the community college has not changed since the days following World War II. As originally envisioned, the challenge remains the same, to be affordable, accessible, and to serve the community in which they are located, thereby assisting students in obtaining their educational goals (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). However, in the attempt to assist students to be successful and achieve their educational goals, colleges have found there are a variety of obstacles slowing the process toward success. First-time first-semester dropout rates and general lack of completion have become one of the major obstacles toward student success. Therefore, the fundamental question is how to slow down or directly halt college freshman attrition or, conversely, what are the components and elements of a student success program that foster retention and completion?

Community Colleges Nationwide in the 21st Century

Even though the community college mission has not changed over the last 100 years, the student demographics have certainly changed. The AACC (2013) provides data reflecting the structure of 1,132 community colleges throughout the United States and descriptive

demographics of the approximately 13 million students. Table 2 provides data regarding common student demographics of the nation's community college attendees.

Table 2. Demographics of Community College Students (2011)

Characteristics	Demographic data	Statistics
Public institutions	Total	1,132
	Public	986
	Independent	115
	Other	115
Head count (fall 2011)	Credit	8M
	Noncredit	5M
	Total	13M
Age of students	Average age	28 years
	≤ 21	39%
	22–39	45%
	40+	15%
Gender	Male	43%
	Female	57%
Ethnicity	Caucasian	52%
	Hispanic	18%
	African American	15%
	Other	10%
	Asian/Pacific Islander	6%
First-time freshmen		45%
First generation		40%
Single parents		16%
Students with disabilities		12%

Note. Adapted from *Fast Facts*, by AACC, 2013. Copyright 2013 by AACC.

In community colleges in the 21st century, non-traditional students (those over 29 years of age, single parents, job holders, part-time students, veterans, swirlers, first-generation college attendees, and attendees with families) are becoming more of the norm rather than the exception. No longer are the majority of students enrolled in a community college 18 years old, right out of high school. This new type of community college student has different attitudes and needs, as well as a distinctive definition for college completion. Consequently, colleges are realizing modifications are required in the traditional support systems colleges have established.

Community colleges must adjust and make changes to the support services for those attending their institution in order to assist them to obtain a certificate and/or degree.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2011) reported that U.S. college attainment rates are so low—roughly 42%—that the college completion status for the nation has dropped from first place to 10th place among the G20 countries. This statistical confirmation illustrating low completion and graduation rates of U.S. postsecondary students prompted President Obama to promote an education agenda and to challenge all American colleges to increase graduation rates by an additional 5 million people by 2020 (Obama, 2009).

In recent years, studies have shown that students are not completing college or certificate programs; students are stopping out or dropping out at alarming rates, not only from community colleges, but also from 4-year institutions (O’Gara, Karp, & Hughes, 2009; Radford, Berkner, Wheelless, & Shepherd, 2010; Scrivener & Coghlan, 2011). According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2008), out of every 100 freshmen entering college for the first time, only 15 will complete a degree or certificate within a 3-year period, and 45 will not complete, and leave without having earned any type of credential.

Across the nation, many community colleges are experiencing low completion and graduation rates, and the statistics are not improving. The Campaign for College Opportunity and the Institution of Higher Education (as cited in Keller, 2013) reported,

According to the Student Success Score Cards released by the California Community College system, only 49.2 percent of community college students who enrolled in 2006 transferred or received a degree within six years. That’s down from 52.3 percent of students who enrolled in 2002. (Keller, 2013, p. 1)

A review of data collected by the ACT Institutional Questionnaire also revealed that in years 2008 and 2009, the first-time full-time student had a retention rate of roughly 51.3% (Habley, 2011) for each of the 2 years, consequently leaving the remaining approximately 48.7%

as non-completers. However, one must keep in mind that most of community college students are enrolled part-time. Nonetheless, this statistic constitutes a loss of nearly half of the entering students prior to the second year of college, with the majority of those who fail to complete generally being students of color.

Illinois Community Colleges

Illinois community colleges are no different from other community colleges throughout the country. Mirroring the rest of the nation, Illinois is also experiencing large numbers of students dropping out in their first year of college, and a very large number are going part-time. Although 48 community colleges in Illinois experienced the highest levels ever of completion for 3 years in a row, according to a report on Illinois community colleges, “Slightly fewer than one in five Illinois students who began their studies as first-time, full-time students at Illinois community colleges in the fall of 2007 graduated by the summer of 2010” (Simon, 2012, p. 2).

The ICCB governs the Illinois community college system, the third largest community system in the United States; has reported “only 21 percent of the first year full time students and 6.4 percent of the part time students are completing college within a three year period” (Jones et al., 2011, p. 6). Minority students make up a large portion of the part-time student population in community colleges. Therefore, the African American and Hispanic American populations have even lower numbers of students completing, a combined total of approximately 5.3% (Jones et al., 2011) within a 3-year time span.

Increasingly, researchers, educators, and policy makers are focusing more on desirable exit points that include successful course completion, degree completion, transferring to 4-year institutions, and /or certificate attainment. However, the fact remains students enrolling in the Illinois 2-year college system to pursue a college degree or certificate are struggling to achieve

their desired results of completion. The lack of completion results in individuals who are unable to compete in the demanding 21st-century workforce. A complex array of contributing dynamics are thought to be at fault for the lack of completion; nonetheless, community colleges must be adaptable to these dynamics and incorporate strategies into new systems to improve student success and completion rates. This study represents an attempt to discover the components of success courses that foster success that can ultimately be used to enhance student completion in community colleges.

Factors Impeding Student Completion/Success

It is well documented in states across the nation and in Illinois that, since 2000, lagging graduation rates in postsecondary education have been a concern to educators and policy makers. Lack of completion is the result of student dropouts in the first or second semesters of college (Aud et al., 2013; Provasnik & Planty, 2008). The literature reveals many students are, for a variety of other reasons, finding it difficult to remain in college through completion. Some of the more prominently cited reasons include inadequate financial aid, poor academic preparation (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010; Calcagno & Long, 2008; Roksa, Jenkins, Jaggars, Zeidenberg, & Cho, 2009), poorly designed remediation (Bautsch, 2011; Bowler, 2009), work schedules, single parenting, and an overall inability to adjust to college life.

Historically, community colleges are known to be affordable, thanks in part to funds in the form of scholarships loans and grant money received from the federal, state, and local governments, along with reasonably low student tuitions and fees (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). However, community colleges are now finding themselves at a critical juncture. In view of the unprecedented economic hardships resulting from the recession that began in the first decade of the 21st century, it is generally believed that financial support from the federal and state

government to institutions has eroded to a point of causing an acute problem for the majority of community colleges across the nation. Contributing to this downward funding spiral are a variety of barriers to degree completion, including the increased need to work to supplement rising tuition costs, increased difficulty in receiving Pell grants, and decreased availability of Monetary Award Program grants. According to Simon (2012), lieutenant governor for the state of Illinois,

In 2002, the maximum MAP award covered the full amount of tuition and fees at public community colleges and four –year universities. By FY12, coverage fell to 56 percent at community colleges and 39 percent at public universities. A growing number of students are being denied an award as need outpaces available funding. (Simon, 2012, p. 25)

All these issues are impinging on students’ completion rates and increasing the number of first-time full-time dropouts.

To offset the decrease in state and federal funding, community college student tuitions and fees have subsequently risen. A national freshman attitudes survey conducted by Noel-Levitz (2013), a nationally respected firm, reported that only 38.8% of freshmen surveyed reported not having financial problems that interfered with their schoolwork, which leaves approximately 61% of freshmen with financial problems that interfere with schoolwork. Additionally, the same survey revealed that only 46.4% of these freshmen thought they had sufficient financial resources to finish college.

Fears of tuition increases and not having adequate resources to complete at a 2-year institution, which has proven over the years to be the most affordable route to college for low-income, nontraditional, and high-risk students, is a mounting issue for students. A report prepared by the Integrated Postsecondary Integrated Education System (as cited in Kelly-Reid & Ginder, 2013) affirmed these fears, noting that the “average cost to attend a Title IV two year institutions as a full-time first-time degree seeking students has increased 7.4 percent from the 2011 to 2013 school year” (p. 5). To add to these mounting fears is the federal sequestration,

authorized by the Budget Control Act of 2011, calling for across-the-board cuts of as much as 5.1%, a reduction that was acknowledged to “impact nearly every federal program that touches community colleges” (AACC, 2013b, p. 1). These cuts can only exacerbate the lagging graduation numbers.

States such as Illinois generally provide one third of the annual budget for its community colleges, with the other two thirds originating from local taxes and student fees (ICCB, 2012). However, as a result of the economic downturn, state revenues have experienced the same difficulties as federal revenues, necessitating a decrease in support for community colleges. According to Sullivan (2013), at one Illinois community college, the “state funding covered 5.8 percent of . . . last year’s budget—a record low and down from 13.3 percent a decade ago” (p. 1), which have had a negative impact on students’ scholarships and grants. The financial disparity just broadens the financial crises facing community colleges. These financial difficulties have generally creating an overall pall on the financial stability of institutions and increased both the number and size of obstacles to student success nationwide.

Financial issues are only one complication contributing to the high number of community college first-semester dropouts and failure to achieve a certificate or degree. Students who are underprepared and enroll in community colleges as a result of open access add to the lagging graduation rates. Allowing accessibility for everyone, a hallmark for community colleges, regardless of a student’s socioeconomic status, ethnicity, prior poor academics, and unpreparedness for the rigor of college academics has become problematic for institutions.

One author expressed the belief that the open door policy has become a cycle for enrolling and dropping out or stopping out, creating what Hope (2010), researcher and dean at Chaffey College, called a “revolving door” (p. 3). Hope believed that, just as there is an open

door policy, there is also a revolving door policy. The revolving door policy implies students are exiting as quickly as they are entering, without achieving their intended educational goals. The open and revolving door policies enable the academically at-risk and nontraditional students the open access promise of community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Goldrick-Rab, 2010).

Allowing accessibility for all students irrespective of poor academics and unpreparedness for the rigors of college academics has become a challenge for community colleges. Recent high school graduates and nontraditional students often discover that they lack the necessary skill set to enroll in college credit courses and be successful. Subsequently, they are relegated to remediation or enrollment into developmental courses upon beginning their college experience. In fact, “nearly half of all college students take at least one remedial course” (League for Innovation in the Community College, 2010, p. 2)

In some circumstances, students are required to take several remedial courses before they can take a college credit-bearing course. The considerable amount of time in remediation sometimes proves to be counterproductive and provides another reason for students to drop out. Bautsch, a policy specialist who covers higher education issues, stated,

The numbers of high school students who enroll in college after graduation is on the rise. Many students, however, are surprised to discover they have failed placement tests and must enroll in remedial courses. This detour from college-level courses can be costly in terms of both time and money. It often can mean the end of the college road for the student. (Bautsch, 2011, p. 1)

Remediation can take as little as one class or as long as 2 years to complete. Generally speaking, the longer the remediation detour, the higher the level of student dissatisfaction and greater the likelihood of the student’s dropping out.

There is no question the need for remediation is widespread. In community colleges, approximately 43 % (Bautsch, 2011b) of students require remediation. A large number of

nontraditional returning adult students are found in the population of remedial students. This population represent adults who have been out of high school for some time and are returning to college to earn a degree or receive job training; often these student need to take remedial courses to brush up on their math, reading, or writing (Vandal, 2010). However, the students tend to remain in remedial course far longer than necessary; they may have only needed a few hours or one semester to become acclimated to a subject area. But, because of testing practices at the institution, these adults become stuck in remedial classes. Mangan (2013a) cited Templin, president of Northern Virginia Community College, who stated:

Too many students are being placed inappropriately in remedial classes on the basis of a single test. . . . As a result, students who might have just needed a little brushing up in a few areas are getting sucked into remedial classes, a vortex where many become discouraged and drop out. (Templin, as cited in Mangan, 2013b, 9)

Because of extensive remediation, situations in life, nontraditional part-time and at-risk students are finding it difficult to complete or to be successful in college, resulting in high dropout and stop-out numbers that are more significant in community colleges than in 4-year institutions. Students are unsuccessful and are dropping out at alarming rates, which increases the lack of college completion numbers. As a direct result, those students who do not complete a certificate or degree are finding it difficult to become employed.

The Illinois community college system provides training for more than 300 different occupations, which assists to fill the workforce and meet the needs of businesses in the districts served by the community colleges. Approximately 75% of those who graduate are employed in the districts served by the community colleges in which they were educated (ICCB, 2012). However, with the increased early dropout numbers, students are not completing the training and education needed to fill the workforce gaps, which in turn, affects their future. Lack of

completion is “resulting in large numbers of poorly prepared young people and adults whose prospects for future advancement are severely limited” (Hinckley et al., 2011, p. 21).

It is no secret there is a rising demand from the workplace for individuals seeking jobs and incumbent workers to be better equipped to compete in a global economy. A 21st-century employable workforce is required to possess a range of midlevel trade skills, technical skills, and professional skills, as well as the high-level skills typically associated with higher education (Klelin-Collins & Soares, 2010). A population of individuals with limited or no postsecondary education is especially problematic for the workforce and reinforces the skill gaps encountered by many corporations. It has been estimated that, by 2018, two thirds of all jobs will require some level of postsecondary education (Kelly & Lautzenheiser, 2013; Kelly & Strawn, 2011).

There is no doubt that having some type of postsecondary education is vital so people can support their families. Individuals who lack training, education, and/or credentials will likely find themselves unemployed and falling further and further behind in a highly technical workplace that continues to rapidly change. There is a dramatic difference in employability for those with some type of college versus those without any college education. In 2011, the unemployment rate for those with credentials or an associate’s degree was approximately 6.9%, while the unemployment rate for those without credentials was approximately doubled 14% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Figure 2 depicts the 2011 unemployment rates based on levels of education achieved.

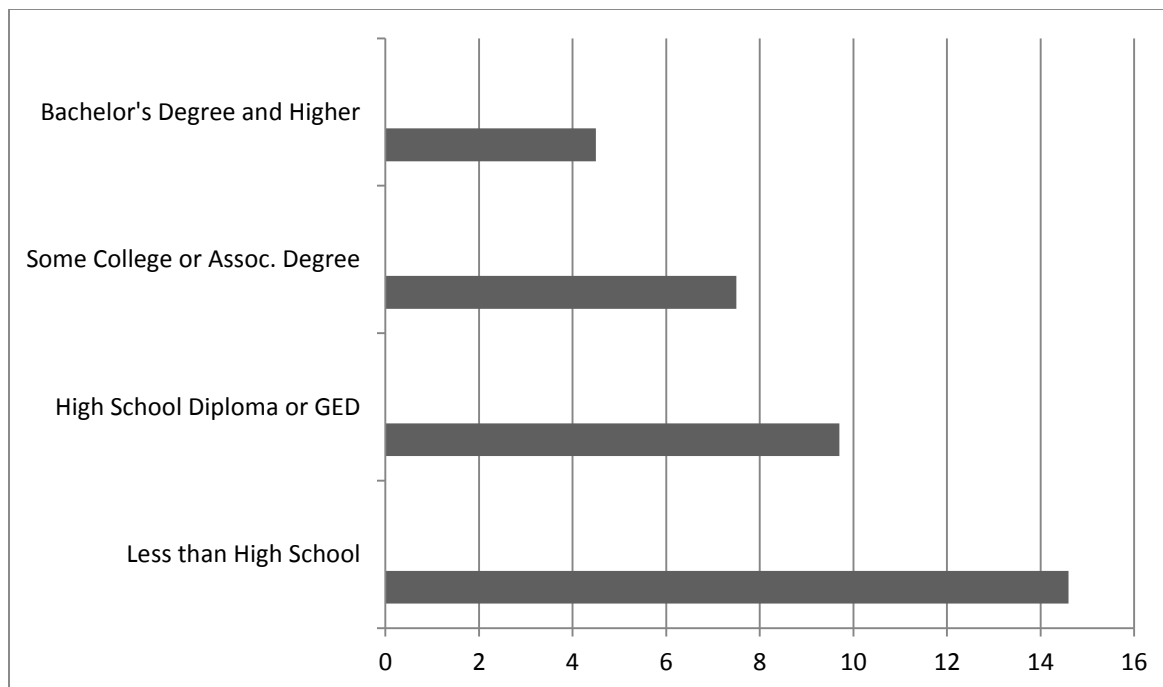


Figure 2. Unemployment rates by level of education. Adapted from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011.

Individuals who are employed not only help themselves and their families, but also their spending power and taxes assist in sustaining the U.S. economy. It has been noted that, “If half of those who drop out actually earned their degree, those new graduates would net \$30 billion more in lifetime income and generate \$5.3 billion in taxpayer revenue” (Kelly & Lautzenheiser, 2013, p. 5). In the 21st century in the United States, education determines access to well-paying jobs.

Because participation in the American dream hinges on employment, dropping out of college makes it difficult for individuals to become successful in navigating futures.

Furthermore, the lack of college completion, whether for certificates or degrees, ultimately places these individuals in positions in which they are ineligible to compete for better or higher paying jobs. Consequently, their lack of a certificate or degree subjugates them to a life of underemployment, which does not pay a family (livable) wage and keeps them in poverty.

Because of mounting pressure from business and industry, college completion is becoming more

and more imperative for individuals, the community, and the nation as a whole. Therefore, community college must continue to investigate and employ some type of college assistance courses to facilitate student completion. This study explores effective student success courses in selected Illinois community colleges in order to share the findings with community colleges across the country.

Identifying Success Courses and Common Components

Introduction

Successful student completion is the goal of all community colleges. It also is a concern with which institutions have struggled over the past few years. Students are not completing college and are dropping out at alarming rates. Therefore, this study attempts to provide community colleges a consistent foundation or framework for well-functioning success courses, which will go far in facilitating college completion.

By design, community colleges are commuter colleges; students attend because the schools are more affordable and accessible, and the students reside in the community (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). For a first-time, first-semester student in particular, navigating postsecondary education is new and challenging. Students find themselves stepping out of their comfort zones into a new and complex environment. The new setting often leaves students vulnerable and in need of assistance in order for them to succeed. An array of programs and initiatives has been created to address students' anxieties and to assist students through college completion.

An initiative that has slowly been adopted by community colleges is student success courses. Success courses have won acceptance for many reasons. According to Cho and Karp (2012), a major reason for the appeal of success courses lies in the fact that

Students who enrolled in a student success course within their first 15 credits were 10 percentage points more likely to earn college-level credits in the first year compared with

their non-enrollee counterparts, and they were 10 percentage points more likely to persist to the next year. (Cho & Karp, 2012, p. 1)

Student success courses are known by a variety of names: freshman year experience, orientation course, first -year seminar, freshman development, welcome week, and student life skills (Harris, 2009; Hope, 2011; Zeidenberg, Jenkins, & Calcagno, 2007). Whereas student success courses are known by a variety of names, throughout this document, these courses will be referred to only as success courses.

Success courses consist of vital college non-academic components offered to support students in attainment of their personal goals. Intended to acclimate students to college life, success courses ultimately are the mechanisms whereby students garner college culture, strategies, and skills necessary for being academically successful in the postsecondary experience (Karp, 2011; Kopko & Cho, 2013; O’Gara et al., 2009; Rutschow, Cullinan, & Welbeck, 2012; Solorzano, Datnow, Park, & Watford, 2013; Stovall, 2003). Success courses are typically not considered as pedagogical activities, which are characteristically more content-based; in contrast, success courses are non-academic components composed of support services that address psychological, sociological, personal, and economic issues.

Although not remedial classes, success courses are believed to be instrumental in distributing information, practices, and tools that can contribute to success in both remedial and college-level course work. Success course functions are supported by numerous organizations and entities; for example; in 2007, the American College Testing organization provided support for success courses by declaring, “Non-academic factors also matter, especially as they relate to academic activities. Non-academic factors can influence academic performance” (p. 1). Researchers also concur and believe academic and non-academic success courses are mutually important (Karp et al., 2012; Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004) in goal achievement. Hope

(2011) believed if some type of both academic and non-academic element are not included in these success courses, the potential to prevent students from achieving college goals is greatly reduced.

Besides providing tools for academic success in the form of supportive services, which are thought to be necessary in assisting to establish a strong academic start for students, success courses are also known for assisting first-semester first-year students by providing those “important resources that enable students to enter and stay enrolled in postsecondary institutions” (Solorzano et al., 2013, p. 55). Researchers who conducted a study of the Virginia community college system of nearly 23,267 students concluded that approximately 14,800 students enrolled in a success course. Of the 14,800 enrollees who persisted into the second year, it was indicated as the expected outcome, “student who enrolled in a student success course within their first semester were six percentage points more likely to persist” (Cho & Karp, 2012, p. 11).

To further validate the significance of success courses Karp, O’ Gara, and Hughes (2009) interviewed 46 students from a Virginia community college and concluded that students generally believed success courses aided in their progression through college-level course work. One student from the study remarked on the effectiveness of success courses as follows:

I have a better understanding of a lot of things. I understand more. I know who to talk to, where to go, how I could go about doing this, and I know I could take advantage of a lot of the programs that’s out there now, that otherwise I’d just be too shy or (think) they can’t do nothing for me. (Karp et al., 2009, p. 11)

In a similar study involving a survey of approximately 37,000 students attending Florida community colleges, researchers found that students who had taken a success course were more likely to obtain their goal (Zeidenberg et al., 2007). Zeidenberg et al. (2007) defined goal attainment as completion of credentials, persistence in college, and/or transferring to a 4-year institution.

Regardless of the established function and the perceived successes, for many community colleges, success courses continue to be associated with certain programmatic uncertainties, which makes enrollment and obtaining the needed support difficult and confusing for typical, first-year first-semester, part-time, nontraditional, and underprepared students. Because of the many uncertainties, frequent misunderstandings, and concerns surrounding success course, this research narrows the lens and focuses the discourse to include (a) the identity of the components and the most common components in which students engage; (b) emotional and behavioral developmental impact of success courses upon those students who engage; (c) ambiguity as to the requirements of success courses; are success course required or are they not and, if required, when should a student be engaged or enrolled and which students are eligible to enroll; and (d) the unpredictability of instructional staff and the impact of this unpredictability on student completion.

Leaders of each institution view success courses from their own lens and deem what is important sociologically, psychologically, economically, or academically. These views lend themselves to a wide degree of diversity in the offering of success courses that acknowledge multifaceted approaches to supporting and meeting the needs of various student populations. In these multifaceted approaches, success courses are thought to “stimulate action to enhance student learning and development in college, and ultimately, degree attainment” (Kinize, Schreiner, Louis, & Nelson, 2012, p. xxvi). Although institutions have various approaches and practices relative to success courses, the overall mission of success courses remains consistent: “non-academic skills and behaviors are germane to college success as are academic preparation” (Karp & Stacey, 2013, p. 1).

Although success courses are germane to college completion, the prevailing question remains: what components are most significant in fostering successful completion? The concept of success courses is so pervasive in college completion that it prompted the CCCSE (2008) to conduct a survey to determine the value community college ascribed to success courses. Findings of the survey indicated a large number of institutions listed success courses and components in their course catalogs. In addition, the survey revealed that among the 288 community colleges responding to the request for information, approximately 83% reported having implemented a student success course.

CCCSE (2008) survey findings, accompanied by conclusions of other researchers, substantiates claims that success courses have a positive influence on development of community college first-year first-semester students. Nevertheless, the particular components or combination of components of success courses that are most accessible and advantageous in fostering college completion remain unclear. Since the CCCSE 2008 survey was completed, researchers (Armstrong, 2011; Bautsch, 2011; Cho & Karp, 2012; Hope, 2011; O’Gara et al., 2009) have supported the perspective that a combination of components in success courses are contributing factors to students’ successful outcomes.

Common Components

Generally speaking, success course schemes include a heavy emphasis on study skills. However, other components, such as personal health, civic responsibility, and sometimes career development are included in success courses. Table 3 represents a compilation of the top 10 components of success courses.

Table 3. Components of Success Courses

Components	Descriptive purpose
Note-taking skills	Assists students in developing and/or organizing lecture and textbook notes. As with other components, the focal point is successfully passing college-level coursework. These particular skills may or may not been required or acquired in high school.
Test-taking skills and preparation	Provides information on how to take tests and managing the time factors involved in test taking.
Time management	Promotes the skill to allocate time needed for study in each enrolled course, as well as how much time can be allocated to leisure activities.
Study skills and habits	Supports an organized approach to review readings, lectures, and preparing for tests. In addition, in some institutions, study skills programs include a focus on grammar. In some instances, first-time first-semester students are unaware of the time commitments required for studying; therefore, a percentage of students are placed on academic probation or do not return the next semester because of poor grades and not performing to the level of expectations of the institution. “Basic study skills courses as their primary type of first-year seminar overwhelmingly indicated that the development of study skills was the most important course topic” (Keup & Petschauer, 2011, p. 11).
Technology	Introduces how to use the computer as a tool of the learning trade (e.g., Blackboard, Desire2Learn)
Critical thinking	Introduces Bloom’s higher order of thinking and reasoning. College students move from basic knowledge and comprehension forward to application, analysis, and ultimately, to synthesis and evaluation. A necessary skill for college-level success.
Life skills	Assists students in balancing multiple roles and day-to-day demands (e.g., stress management, health management, building relationships, and networking).
College policies	Provides an understanding of the processes and procedures of an individual institution and available college services and an understanding of the culture.
Learning styles	Students are assessed and introduced to how they best learn and how to use strategies that best benefit their style of learning.
Guided campus tours	An introduction to the campus in general with specific insight into the library, Academic Skills Center, and tutoring services.

In an auxiliary survey, the research staff of CCCSE (2012) sought to identify the most common components of success courses. CCCSE staff compiled the findings from community

colleges across the country. The survey instrument, the Community College Institutional Survey, was administered to gauge which components students used most frequently. Based on input from 238 responding institutions, the CCCSE concluded the top four components students most frequently engaged in or relied on were

- study skills (90% of the time),
- time management skills (88% of the time),
- note-taking skills (88% of the time), and
- test-taking skills (85% of the time; CCCSE, 2012, p. 18).

These findings reinforced researchers' understanding of the importance of student engagement in success courses and the integral nature of these courses to successful college completion.

Emotional and Behavioral Content Relationship

Success courses not only assist in formulating pathways for students' future success and completion, but also provide a foundation for achievement in the more pedagogically significant academic activities and competencies (Bautsch, 2010; Karp & Stacey, 2013; Sommerfeld, 2011). Success courses also formulate successful pathways to emotional and behavioral competencies.

It is believed that engagement in success courses supports students' development and monitoring of emotional and behavioral experiences in college and possibly throughout life. A study at Guilford Technical Community College revealed

Student success courses had a positive impact on students' self-management, interdependence, self-awareness, interest in lifelong learning, emotional intelligence, and positive engagement in college, among students who had low levels of these attributes. (Rutschow, Cullinan, & Welbeck, 2012, p. 27)

Continuous development in students' management of emotions and behaviors is another important aspect of student success. "Policies and practices that enable emotionally supportive relationships can have a positive impact on academic achievement by helping students to develop the capacity for strategic thinking, problem solving, information-seeking, and

experimentation and optimism” (Romer, Hyman, & Coles, 2009, p. 11). Components of success courses that promote emotional and behavioral competencies typically focus on relationship building. Relationship building becomes the vanguard for students’ interaction with peers external and to the college environment, faculty, internal college peers, administrators, and others perceived as caring individuals. Fundamentally speaking, “In order to thrive in school and college students need to be surrounded by a network of adults and peers who care about their academic success” (Romer et al., 2009, p. 11).

Success courses provide students with an avenue to establish and engage in a network with caring individuals. This new network has the potential to serve as the catalyst that precipitates students’ social and behavioral development, resulting in students making the necessary adjustments to achieve personal goals. Furthermore, college success courses often provide a variety of experiences that empower students to better control and monitor their emotions and behaviors. Chickering (1969), an educational researcher of student development, opined that being better able to control and monitor emotions and behaviors might contribute to attributes that lead to more successful completers.

To paraphrase Chickering (1969), development results from a variety of experiences that add to students achieving growth, leading to the students’ own identity and providing the attributes to become successful completers. The more a student is engaged in college and extracurricular activities, the more these activities “promote engagement that increases the odds students will connect with the learning environment” (Kuh, 2008, p. 3). Involvement, such as participating in leadership roles, volunteering, joining in organizations, securing internships, working at jobs, participating in athletics, or joining clubs encourages and can fosters learning and subsequently completion among college students. Involvement in activities provides sources

of hope and encouragement (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Chickering (1969) further hypothesized that, regardless of whether a student is new to college or returning after being out for a time, he or she is likely to experience emotions such as anxiety, anger, depression, desire, guilt, longing, hopelessness, and boredom. These negative emotions can become overwhelming, affecting behavior and derailing the student's ability to achieve his or her goals. Success courses are presumed to mitigate negative emotions that might be contributing factors to students not completing college (Romer et al., 2009).

Chickering and Reisser (1993) indicated that emotional development is an outgrowth of success courses and is valuable to students' college achievement. These researchers endorsed success courses as being an ideal mechanism to help students engage in both work and learning and integrate the two activities. Chickering and Reisser consolidated this concept of knowledge and practices by identifying seven vectors or stages of student development. Vectors are perceived as pathways students travel toward individuality, addressing emotions, and behavior development along the way.

According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), Chickering's "development involves differentiation and integration as students encounter increasing complexity in ideas, values, and other people and struggle to reconcile these new positions with their own ideas, values and beliefs" (p. 21). Contentious development plays an important role in whether a student is successful in college completion. The seven vectors provide insight into the reasoning behind the students' emotions and behaviors and the attempt at development and growth, as channeled in success courses. These seven vectors are as follows:

- Vector 1 involves achieving/developing, which increases the development of intellectual capabilities and self-discipline, laying the foundational path for the development of the other six vectors.
- Vector 2, managing emotions, assists the student with recognizing and coping with emotions (e.g., anxiety, depression, guilt, shame, sympathy, caring, optimism).
- Vector 3, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, involves being able to successfully balancing independence and interdependence.
- Vector 4, mature interpersonal relationships, involves the transition of a student into a person capable of reflecting on others' values, ideas, and backgrounds with tolerance and respect. "At its heart is the ability to respond to people in their own right" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 22).
- Vector 5, establishing identity, involves retaining parts of vectors 1 through 4 while extending beyond the previous vectors. Students in this vector have developed solid and stable self-esteem. "A solid sense of self emerges, and it becomes more apparent that there is an 'I' who coordinates the facets of personality" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 49).
- Vector 6, developing purpose, "entails an increasing ability to be intentional, to assess interests and options, to clarify goals, to make plans and to persist despite obstacles" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 224).
- Vector 7, developing integrity, is the culmination and outgrowth the development of the other six vectors. By the time students reach Vector 7, they have developed humanizing and personalizing values and a sense of congruence. Students have moved from:

Being undecided to choosing a program or major; assessing and responding to the need for skill development essential to college and career success; managing family, work, and other responsibilities; and facing the day-to-day psychological challenges associated with beliefs and expectation related to becoming a confident, competent, committed, and successful students. (Brown & Rivas, 2011, p. 58)

Vector 2 is of particular interest for this study because it supports the emotional and behavioral components of success courses. It is reasoned that development and growth occur when emotions and impulses are monitored and controlled (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Emotions and behavior under control can translate into useable skills for use both within and outside the classroom (Brown & Rivas, 2011).

Vector 2 focuses on the students' emotional and behavioral development as well as the ability to manage and control these emotions and behaviors. Hope (2010) and Stovall (2003) ascribed to the notion that emotional and behavioral components of student success courses can be powerful in shaping students' cognitive and social development. While the college experience is a new culture for first-year first-semester students, the development of emotions and behaviors have been established as important to shaping students and influencing completion rates. Success courses provide the additional support necessary to aid in student development. Sociological and psychological theories in the literature further support the need for additional assistance in the development of emotional and behavioral attributes for first-year first-time students.

Tinto (1993), for example, supported the need of success courses in assisting students with their emotional and behavioral development and growth. Tinto's theory of student departure provides a psychological perspective from which to view the need for additional student support via success courses. Tinto's interactive model supports the importance of managing emotions and behaviors. He theorized that positive emotional encounters can cause students to be more engaged in the education process, while negative encounters will have the opposite effect. If

students do not make these necessary social and emotional connections and behavioral adjustments, they are less likely to complete their educational goals. Without these social and emotional connections, students are more inclined to leave the institution before completing the degree or certificate program.

Similarly, Rendón's (1994) validation theory supports more of a sociological view and expresses the importance of students' emotional wellbeing as an influencing factor on student completions. According to Rendón (1994) validation is "enabling, confirming and supporting student either by in-and out-of-class agents that foster academic and interpersonal development" (p. 44). Developing and monitoring attributes of emotion and behaviors are the outcomes of the maturation process represented by Vector 2.

Tinto (1993) and Rendón (1994) referred to the concept of student fit as a possible example of emotion and behavior attitudes, which corresponds to Chickering's (1969) Vector 2. Fit is the perception of social or emotional comfort that dictates a student's emotional and behavioral outcome. If the student feels the college is a fit for him or her, he or she is less likely to drop out, and he or she will increase his or her student engagement in the college culture. Success courses can act as conduits and can be a first step to addressing student engagement and development.

Emotional and behavioral development aid in the production of the fit factor. If fit is not present for whatever reason, including isolation, incongruence, "mismatch or lack of 'fit' between the needs, interests, and preferences of the individual and those of the institutions" (Tinto, 1993, p. 50), students typically drop out. Schools can promote fit because "support structures within the institution often provide the means for students to persist when they might otherwise be unable to do so. Although, neither academic nor social, these structures provide for

students' needs" (Schreiner, Louis, & Nelson, 2012, p. 44). Subsequently, students have moved from:

being undecided to choosing a program or major; assessing and responding to the need for skill development essential to college and career success; managing family, work, and other responsibilities; and facing the day-to-day psychological challenges associated with beliefs and expectation related to becoming a confident, competent, committed, and successful students. (Brown & Rivas, 2011, p. 58)

Ambiguity of Requirement (Enrollment Timing)

Another characteristic of success courses that can be confusing for students is when to enroll. Students and institutions alike agree that success courses can be beneficial if completed early in the college experience. Higher education researchers (Barefoot, Arcario, & Guzman, 2011; Cho & Karp, 2012; Hope, 2011; King & Fox, 2011; Terenzini & Reason, 2005) all concurred: students should become engaged in success courses early in their first year and first semester to fully realize the benefits of these supportive services. O'Gara et al. (2009) reiterated the importance of timing and effectiveness as considerations for participating in success courses, stating,

The student success course was a key source of information for students; the timing of the course influenced the usefulness of this information. Almost every student . . . who took the student success course found it useful. Those who found the course unhelpful took the course during their second semester rather than during their first. (O'Gara et al., 2009, p. 213)

When students take advantage and become involved in the success courses within the first semester of college, they typically will persist to college completion.

The time at which students first engage in success courses can play a significant role in students' successful completion. According to a study of student success courses at Virginia community colleges, researchers Cho and Karp (2012) discovered "a large percentage of student who enrolled in a student success course within their first 15 enrolled credits earned credits in the

first year and persisted into the second year” (p. 7). Despite findings that timing of enrollment in student success courses is important, many institutions send conflicting messages.

First-time first-semester students receive conflicting and confusing messages about the offerings or scheduling of success courses. These messages and mechanisms for delivery of these courses differ from institution to institution. It is sometimes unclear within institutions when students should access these valuable support services.

For example, according to research conducted in the Virginia community college system (Cho & Karp, 2012), students in all associate’s degree programs must complete success courses to be eligible for graduation. These same success courses are required by some certificate programs. Although the courses are a requirement, only 68% of the 88% of students earning a college degree from the Virginia community college system actually enrolled in a success course. Of the 59% graduating with a certificate, only 42% had enrolled in a success courses (Cho & Karp, 2012).

Not only are there inconsistencies in when students should enroll in success courses, but also there is the underlining question of which students student should be engaging in success courses. In certain institutions, success courses are reserved for underprepared student who are enrolled in remedial education classes (Bautsch, 2011). At some institutions, students who are enrolled in two or more developmental courses are automatically placed in a success course. However, in other institutions, a wide spectrum of students was found to believe the content of success courses beneficial (Zeidenberg et al., 2007) and enrolled in them without prompting. Students in specific content areas and programs, and student athletes are often designated for immediate enrollment in success courses.

While enrollment in success courses is sporadically designated as automatic for some institutions, other institutions leave the choice of whether and when to enroll entirely up to the individual student. Although not exhaustive, Table 4 represents various community colleges success courses enrollment policies and practices.

Table 4. Enrollment Policies and Practices of Success Courses

Scenario	Requirement	Student population
A	Immediate enrollment	All full-time first-time students (Including Transferees')
B	Immediate enrollment	Only full-time freshmen status
C	Immediate enrollment	All full-time and part-time freshmen status
D	Enrollment based on cut-off scores (COMPASS/ ACCUPLACER)	All students (including Transferee)
E	Placed in one or more developmental education Course	All full-time first-year first-semester students
F	Enrollment, anytime, before completing 15 credit hours	Full-time freshmen students only
G	Immediate enrollment required	Student enrolled in special programs (i.e., nursing, business, STEM, athletes)
H	Required any time before graduation	All students
G	Immediate enrollment	All students on academic probations

Meanwhile, because of the vagueness in policies and practices, and the choices to enroll or not to enroll, sometimes determined by students with little or no knowledge, students miss out on the benefits of success courses. All too often, students do not enroll in the success courses unless they are directed to do so (O’Gara et al., 2009). All too frequently, enrollment comes about as a result of failing multiple classes the first semester.

Unpredictable Instructional Staff

A final observation that has caused concern for success courses is the unpredictable appointing of instructional staff. Assignment of faculty or instructional staff is likely to fluctuate

from day to day, depending on which components or topics are being taught. Sometimes, disconcerting attitudes (i.e., confusion and frustration) develop in first-year first-semester students. Unlike most community college academic classes, the non-academic success courses typically do not have instructors steadfastly assigned to any particular component. In many community colleges, as well as many 4-colleges and universities, faculty assigned to success courses frequently consist of adjuncts, newly hired (first-time instructors), academic advisors, librarians, student affairs administrators, and internal and external subject matter experts. There are numerous reasons why the unpredictability of instructional staff can become problematic for students and their ability to achieve the goal of completion. Two principle rationales include the lack of training of the instructor and the lack of time for students to bond with the instructor.

First, staff assigned to serve as instructors of success courses are not always faculty. These individuals typically have limited training and knowledge of how to teach a success course or how to effectively engage students in the manner necessary to enhance completion. Engaging students in success courses involves teaching students to build bridges (Groccia & Hunter, 2012). These strong foundational designs assist students in making the necessary adjustments to become successful navigators of their college academic and non-academic experiences. These courses teach students to become an apprentice and rely on instructional staff for direction that aids students in their individual development (Grossman, 2009). Instructors assigned to teach success courses, then, are responsible for collaboration with students and delivery of rudimentary skills and knowledge necessary for college completion. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of faculty to assist students in becoming “different, enriched, and transformed individuals” (Garner, 2012, p. 4).

Fluctuations of untrained or inadequately trained facilitators assigned to success courses create an unstable environment for new enrollees to college, as well as nontraditional, returning, underprepared, and non-native language speakers. These students have already enrolled in institutions with issues surrounding college culture; they may also lack the structures needed to be successful. In some cases, the instability of instructional staff may prevent students from fully benefiting from the experiences of college; in the worst case, having an untrained instructor for a success course can negatively influence a student's motivation and completion. In addition, a poorly chosen instructor can undermine the importance of the bond between student and faculty (Groccia & Hunter, 2012).

The time faculty are available to bond with students is another unpredictable instructional factor associated with untrained or inadequately trained instructors of success courses. Proper training allows instructors to engage, motivate, and make a positive impact on students to propel them to completion. Generally, individuals assigned as instructors to success courses have other responsibilities; success courses are not a priority. Therefore, the time these faculty devote to success courses may be limited. With such a diverse instructional pool, the unpredictability of who will be instructing and how long they are engaged with students can become problematic for first-time first-semester students. Encountering a new instructor in each meeting of the success course can make it difficult for students to develop a sense of trust and, as a result, they can become disconnected with the college process and drop out (Garner, 2012; Rendón, 1999; Tinto, 1993). As Hope (2010) remarked, "At the core, the success course is design to create a supportive landscape for learning, to provide an opportunity for students to interact with each other and with their institutions" (p. 5).

Relationships with faculty are important for students. Interactions between faculty and students forge future involvement in academic and non-academic activities alike. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) advocated “evidence strongly suggests that faculty have an influential casual role in students’ educational aspiration” (p. 394). Students’ first year and first semester are periods of adjustment. This period of adjustment should be spent with faculty to sort out emotions and behaviors in the new college environment. Students’ hopelessness and the confusion can be minimized when there are consistent instructors represented in the classrooms and ample time to provide the necessary nurturing. Success courses also require time and resources and the acknowledgement as a priority for instruction (Grossman, 2009).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this research study provides the lens to situate the research and to analyze the data collected. In this study, the researcher strove to identify the components of first-year first-semester college success courses specifically designed to foster student success in community colleges. Students’ integration into the community college cultural environment, as well as being academically successful, can be difficult. Because of the alarmingly low completion numbers in community colleges across the nation, it is important to take a larger view of the topic. This study sought to gather information to aid in identifying the components, course design, and course assessment processes of success courses from the perspective of those who work in the field. Information and data collected from this study will assist in expanding the knowledge base regarding which components are utilized most often and to the greatest benefit in the enhancement of student achievement.

As of 2015, no single concept, theory, or principle has been recognized as the foundational piece or framework for best practices in all success courses. Many concepts or

lenses could have been used to investigate this topic. However, for this study three lenses were utilized to investigate the components of student success courses: a theory, principles, and a model for program evaluation. The research data were viewed through the lens of Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement. The CCCSE (2012) seven principles for student success served as a second lens for the investigation. The third lens for the investigation was Stufflebeam's (1966) program evaluation model of CIPP. Together, the theory, principles, and program evaluation model served as the conceptual framework for the research.

Over the years, institutions have utilized success courses to support and enhance students' attendance, intellect, and social and psychological development. Notwithstanding their benefits, student success courses have provided mixed messages to college leaders as to which components work and which components do not work. One study at three Virginia community colleges, which involved interviewing approximately 170 staff, faculty, and students, reported success courses were respected as being effective (Karp et al, 2012). However, findings from other researchers (Rutschow et al., 2012; Weiss, Brock, Sommo, Rudd, & Turner, 2011) suggest that success courses do not generate long-lasting impacts. Regardless of outcomes, community colleges continue to implement success courses and offer an array of topics. Most community college leaders hope that the precise combinations of topics will somehow emerge from the muddle, resulting in increased student completion rates and adequately trained and prepared individuals for the workforce.

There is mounting pressure on community college leaders to substantiate the usefulness of student success courses. Stakeholders are demanding community college leaders to produce a variety of outcomes. Obama (2009) pressured community colleges to increase college completion rates to regain top status among developed nation. Business and industry leaders'

desire for a better equipped workforce has charged the community college with the task of training future employees. There are ongoing debates compelling leading theorists (Astin, 1999; Kuh, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2006) to validate how students benefit from these non-academic experiences and how institutions can best deliver success courses.

Community college leaders are also feeling pressure from students who desire a more rapid path to degree completion, which ultimately benefits institutions, the workforce, and the students themselves. These pressures, coupled with other emerging questions, the accuracy of the information disseminated, relevance and the quality of skills offered, and the satisfactory outcomes rest on the shoulders of the community college leaders to deliver on these demands.

In order to address student success and improve student completion numbers, there must first be a clear understanding of what is currently in place to assist students persisting through goal completion. Why community college students are unsuccessful in goal attainment and what factors are needed to foster student success are daunting questions. Several relevant theories pertaining to why and/or what students needed to become successful college completers were evaluated in the process of conducting this study.

Relevant Theories

This research contemplated a variety of theories, including Astin's (1999) student involvement theory, Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure, Pascarella's (1985) model for assessing change, Knowles's (1975, 2012) andragogy theory, Skinner's (2004) behaviorism theory, Chickering's (1993) theory of identity development, and Holland's (2007) personality theory. Astin (1985, 1999), Tinto (1993) Pascarella (2005), and Chickering (1969) depicted models that view students' completion primarily from an environmental construct.

Environmental construct models sanction either one or all of the stipulated influences of

institution involvement and/or support, prior experiences, as well as background knowledge and how these characteristics affect students' development. Knowles (1975, 2012), Skinner (1948, 2004), and Holland viewed student success from a more behavior- and personality-driven construct. A summarization of the core concept for these relevant theories is provided in Table 5.

Table 5. Core Concepts of Relevant Theories Considered for Framework

Theorist	Core concepts
Astin (1984,1999)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investment of psychosocial and physical energy 2. Involvement is continuous, student investment varying energy 3. Involvement has qualitative and quantitative features 4. Development is directly proportional to quality and quantity of involvement 5. Educational effectiveness is related to level of student involvement
Tinto (1997, 1993)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pre-entry attributes 2. Goals/commitments 3. Institutional experiences 4. Integration 5. Outcomes
Pascarella (1982, 2005)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Student background/pre-college traits 2. Structural/organizational characteristics 3. Institutional environments 4. Interactions with agents of socialization
Knowles (1975, 2012)	<p>Quality of student effort</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learners need to know (why, what, how) 2. Self-concept of the learner (autonomous, self-directing) 3. Prior experience of the learner (resource, mental models) 4. Readiness to learn (life related, developmental tasks) 5. Orientation to learning (problem centered, contextual) 6. Motivation to learn (intrinsic value, personal payoff)
Chickering (1993, 1997)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Developing competence 2. Managing emotions 3. Moving through autonomy toward interdependence 4. Developing mature interpersonal relationships 5. Establishing identity 6. Developing purpose 7. Developing integrity
Skinner (2004)	Operant Conditioning

Theorist	Core concepts
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Neutral operants: (environmental responses that neither increase nor decrease behaviors), individuals have no will; they only respond to stimuli. 2. Responses: to external stimuli are to fulfill basic needs. 3. Guidance: is needed for students' appropriate behavior. 4. Reinforces: (either positive or negative): students cannot self-govern but need arranged reinforces 5. Punishment: (weakens behavior) or if behavior is not managed problems will increase.
Holland (2007)	Personalities types that dictate goal achievement <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Realistic 2. Investigative 3. Artistic 4. Social 5. Enterprising 6. Conventional

Although each of these seven theories has merit and could have contributed greatly to this study of identifying the components of student success courses that foster success, Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement was chosen. Although Astin's research was primarily conducted among 4-year colleges and universities, the findings have implications applicable to community colleges, particularly in terms of community colleges whose leaders are grappling with how to improve college completion rates. Astin's theory was chosen because (a) it is student-centered, views growth and completion, and takes into consideration the responsibility of the student; (b) it focuses on relationship development; (c) it embraces most environmental influences faced by students; and (d) it can "be used both by researchers to guide their investigation of student development and by college administrators and faculty to help them design more effective learning environments" (Astin, 1999, p. 518). These aspects of the theory are important because they allow for student engagement in learning and applying newly learned concepts and activities simultaneously.

Astin's Theory

The basic core concepts of Astin's (1999) research are distinguishable by three signature elements: inputs, environment, and outputs. Astin's input, environment, and output (IEO) are the components used to measure the effects of college environments on educational completion.

Figure 3 provides a graphical representation of the interconnectedness of Astin's three components.

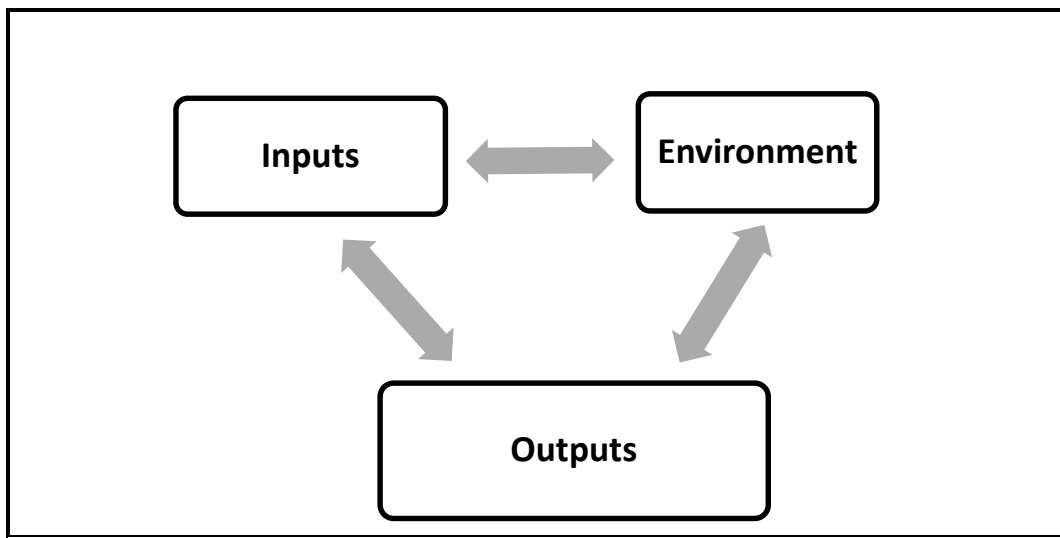


Figure 3. Interconnectedness of Astin's (1999) IEO.

Astin's (1999) IEO model emphasizes the idea that success and completion are dynamic and heavily influenced by the interactions of the IEO components. His model can assist leaders of institutions in comprehending how success courses can make a positive impact on student completion. Moreover, the model also explains why placing a priority on any one individual component dictates the amount of physical and psychology energy that will be exhausted by the effort. According to the student involvement theory, the sum total of a student's involvement and experiences between each area (input and environment) separately and combined, ultimately influences college outcomes and completions.

It is important to understand input, environment, and output individually to comprehend how they work together. Inputs are representative of students' demographic attributes (e.g., family background, and social and academic experiences) prior to entering college. Students' behaviors, emotions, awareness, and backgrounds are already established prior to entering college. Environment represents students' prior knowledge and experiences in conjunction with their new college experiences and skills (e.g., social, emotional, academic, precollege information, psychological, interactions with faculty and staff, college processes) acquired while in college. In his model, Astin addressed environmental issues and their impact on students' behavior. When combined, input and environment contribute to facilitate students' output or outcomes. Outputs are represented by students' acquired values, beliefs, knowledge, skills, grade point average (GPA), workforce readiness, civic engagement, and ultimately college completion. Outputs collectively represent the culmination of inputs and environment cooperatively. Outputs can also be the consequence of either input or environment, mutually exclusive of one another, each having an impact on students' outcomes independently.

Essentially, students' prior experiences and knowledge will determine how students think and react to certain environmental clues. Consequently, the involvement of input and environment collectively and individually serve as a catalyst for the physiological and psychological outputs a student deems necessary, resulting in shaping students' outcomes. Input and environment are indicators of how students connect intellectually, socially, psychologically, emotionally, and scholastically. These interactions frequently determine students' success or failure in college, and can carry over into workforce experiences.

According to the student involvement theory (Astin, 1985), "student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic

experience” (p. 518). Austin claimed that highly involved students devote considerable energy to studying, participate actively in organizations and clubs, and make it their business to interact with faculty in class and outside of class. College students have a considerable autonomy over their college experiences; it is their responsibility to decide when and how to engage in their environment. Presumably, the more time involved on tasks, the better the outcomes. Other researchers (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005) agreed that students learn best by being involved learners.

In an attempt to acquire a better understanding and to explain student involvement theory and how it related to college completion, in 1975, Astin conducted a study that focused on college dropouts. He strove to identify the common elements in college environments that caused students to suddenly withdraw or drop out. Astin discovered that, in nearly every institution investigated as part of the study, students who hastily withdrew or dropped out typically identified their reason for dropping out or withdrawing as the lack of involvement and or limited interaction with peers and faculty.

Astin conducted a second study in 1977. This longitudinal study involved more than 200,000 students and over 80 possible types of student involvements (Astin, 1985). As Gasser (1977) explained, “The most important general conclusion from this study was that greater-than-average changes in the characteristics of first year students were associated with nearly all forms of student involvement” (p. 91). Astin’s (1985) study revealed that involvement was strongly tied to students’ social and intellectual development, as well as a strong tie to student retention.

Astin’s (1999) theory emphasizes involvement as being multifaceted and taking place in many ways. This theory is an integral part of success courses because of its behavioral component, which is considered critical to student development. To better comprehend the

attributes of Astin's involvement theory, it is necessary to understand his five postulates. Each of the five dynamic postulates is considered pragmatic and can characteristically be found integrated within success courses. Astin's (1985, 1999) five postulates of involvement are as follows:

- Postulate 1: Involvement requires the investment of psychosocial and physical energy (Astin, 1999). Astin (1985) explained, "It is not so much what the individual thinks or feels but what he or she does that defines and identifies involvement (p. 135). For first-time first-semester community college students, involvement can be exemplified by full participation in success courses. Involvement is also depicted as participation in academic classes and other extracurricular activities. Astin theorized that the energy invested could be either broad or generalized (i.e., the college experience) or precise and personalized (e.g., studying for a math test). Physical and-psychological investment is incorporated in all environmental influences, academics, and non-academics activities.
- Postulate 2: Involvement in the collegiate experiences occurs on a continuum. Environmental inputs are not stagnant and should not be confined to a single occurrence. Because students mature at various rates, their needs change and their understanding of college life also changes; as such, there should be an evolution of the views and resources available to students by institutions, and these views and resources must revolve around the evolving student (Astin, 1999).
- Postulate 3: Involvement can be identified quantitatively and qualitatively in college experiences (Astin, 1999). Quantitatively, events can include academic and non-academic (components of success courses) involvement with the environment.

Quantitative measures include hours spent studying, hours spent socializing, or hours involved in civic engagements. The outcomes of quantitatively measured activities can expressed qualitatively in terms of recall for exams, meeting new people, or becoming more knowledgeable about college culture and resources, or becoming politically astute.

- Postulate 4: Involvement as a result of the amount of student learning/development is directly proportional to quality and quantity of engagement. When students develop a profound connection with their environment (i.e., academics, the college experience), they expend more time (quantity) on that connection, generally resulting in a successful learning experience (quality). Therefore, quality and quantity of time involved in the various components of success courses are pivotal to the effectiveness and service as beneficial outcomes.
- Postulate 5: Involvement is reflected in the educational effectiveness of any policy or practice related to its capacity to induce student involvement. The fifth postulate is the only one not directed exclusively toward the students' responsibilities. It includes the responsibilities of institution leaders and their recruitment and retention policies, in addition to the institution leaders' abilities and willingness to support success courses by means of policies and practices placed to support students. Student success courses depend on institutions for such things as a variety of course offering times, accommodations for schedules of students who work or for those with school-aged children; trained faculty who can instruct a success course to satisfy multiple learning styles, accommodations for a variety of learning levels, and learning conditions.

Kuh (2008), an advocate for student engagement, supported Astin's (1999) theory, and remarked as follows about student engagement:

Student engagement represents two critical features. The first is student driven: the amount of time and effort student put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities. The second is institution driven: how a school deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum, other learning opportunities, and support services to induce students to participate in activities that lead to the experiences and outcomes that constitute student success (persistence, satisfaction, learning, and graduation. (Kuh, 2008, p. 87)

Astin's (1999) theory embraces student involvement intellectually, emotionally, and psychologically. This involvement is fundamental to the design of success courses that can deliver higher college completion numbers. Participatory learning environmental involvement is perceived to be a key element in connecting students to enhanced learning experiences.

It has been well documented that students who are involved in their learning process tend to progress better than those who are not engaged (Astin, 1985; Chickering, 1997; Hope, 2010; Rendón, 1994; Tinto, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In line with Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement, investment of students' time and energy on task is a critical component for student success. Success is also predicated on partnerships involvement. Astin delineated the major components of students success are collaborative efforts of students' academics, non-academics, and faculty and peer involvements.

[Center for Community College Student Engagement \(CCCSE\)](#)

The CCCSE, under the Community College Leadership Program of the University of Texas at Austin, provides ongoing research into the relationship between student success and student engagement. A 3-year study conducted by CCCSE (2012) revealed that, to maximize student (success) completion, the design of success courses must incorporate seven critical principles. "No matter what program or practice a college implements, it is likely to have a

greater impact if its design incorporates the following principles” (CCCSE, 2012, p. 5). These seven critical principles for student success are highlighted in Table 6.

Table 6. CCCSE Concept: Seven Principles for Student Success

Principle	Clarification
Strong start	Ensuring students are connecting as early as possible in the first weeks of their college experiences with necessary administrators, faculty, and staff
Clear coherent pathways	Have targeted and direct logical steps toward completion. Unclear choices and unnecessary barriers only hinder progress. Student success can be improved by assisting students in developing clear and understandable pathways to completion. Navigating college experiences is an intimidating task for a first-timer.
Integrated support	Because time is of the essence for the majority of community college students and particularly for non-traditional students, support should be provided immediately when and where it is needed. Support should be within the learning context and not separated from the learning experience where it is needed.
High expectations and high support	When standards are set high and are reasonable and the necessary support systems are in place, students will rise to the occasion.
Intensive student engagement	The overarching focus of success programs is to promote student involvement; therefore, institution leaders will need to consider making student engagement a mandatory part of the college experience.
Design scale	As in any new initiative before success can be realized, student success endeavors require a commitment of time and financial resources from institution administrators, faculty, and staff. That commitment must endure throughout the initiative.
Professional development	“Improving student success rates and meeting college completion goals require individuals not only to re-conceptualize their roles but also to work differently. This means that professional development . . . is for everyone: staff, faculty,

Principle	Clarification
	administrators, and governing boards” (CCCSE, 2012, p. 5).

Note. Adapted from *A Matter of Degrees: Promising Practices for Community College Student Success, A First Look*, by CCCSE, 2012, p. 5. Copyright 2012 by CCCSE.

The principles require a similar investment of students’ time on task. Additionally, there is the required investment of committed institutions willing to provide resources to achieve desired outcomes of success courses: increased completion numbers.

The seven principles of student engagement, as endorsed by CCCSE (2012), are essential elements for the advancement of students’ involvement in the educational institution and for the creation of opportunities that will further students’ success. Each principle is designed to construct a path along which institutions design success courses, measure student success rates, provide resources, and promote accountability to all concerned. As explained by the CCCSE (2013), “By focusing on components, colleges can construct the practices to meet explicit goals for learning, skill building, and student support” (p. 7).

Strategies advocated by the CCCSE were validated by a study conducted the New England Literacy Resource Center ([NELRC] 2009), which showed results similar to those found by the CCCSE. NELRC (2009) and the Survey of Entering Student Engagement ([SENSE] CCCSE, 2008) both recognized six of the seven CCCSE (2012) strategies for college persistence to completion by means of student involvement, as delineated in Table 7.

Table 7. NELRC: Six Drivers for College Persistence to Completion: SENSE

SENSE	NELRC	CCCSE
Sense of belonging and community	Connecting to someone who makes the student feel welcome and makes the process less intimidating, fostering relationships.	Personal connections

SENSE	NELRC	CCCSE
Clarity of purpose	Assisting students in clarifying their goals and presenting a clear pathway to attaining those goals.	A plan and a pathway to success
Agency	Training students to become self-advocates. Making this goal happen as they see themselves.	High expectations and aspirations
Competence	Affirming that students can be successful. Respecting the prior knowledge students bring to college with them.	An effective track to college readiness
Relevance	Making learning intentional.	Engaged learning
Stability	Providing support systems throughout the college experience.	An integrated network of financial, social, and academic support systems.

In recent years, postsecondary education has been actively engaged in a paradigm shift. There are strong indications by educators suggesting that a focused shift to student engagement in college campus activities such as academic activities involving reading, writing, and math, as well as extracurricular and non-academic support activities are yielding an improvement in completion numbers. CCCSE recognized it is not merely students' involvement in college activities alone that resolves the obstacles preventing goal attainment. There are multiple corrective actions that can be put into place to contribute to student success.

Community college freshmen enter the educational institution from all socioeconomic strata, with varied levels of scholastic preparedness. They all have similar goals and expectations: to complete their college course of action. However, because of the nature of community college students are; commuters, retoolers, second language learners, first-generation college students and large proportion of students will leave before the end of first semester (Barefoot et al., 2011; Brown & McPhail, 2011). The CCCSE (2013) affirmed, "Learning, persistence, and attainment in college are consistently associated with students being actively

engaged with college faculty and staff, with other students, and with the subject matter they are studying” (p. 3). Therefore, it becomes the arduous task of institution leaders to provide the necessary tools to assist students in finishing their academic goals, as well as to provide tools that prepare students to interact with their environment and become productive citizens. To better understand success beyond the first year of college and become successful, students will need to learn how to first adapt and then to engage with their college environments where and when necessary.

According to the CCCSE (2013), several community colleges, including Kingsborough Community College in New York, Kapi’olani Community College in Hawaii, Austin Community College in Texas, and Northeast Alabama Community College in Alabama celebrated the positive achievements resulting from utilization of student engagement components. Involvement in specific activities equips first-time students with necessary structure, which is sometimes needed for successful goal achievement. Approximately 83% of the 288 institutions surveyed by CCCSE (2012) and CCIS (2011) reported students’ participation in student success courses.

Given that the focus of the present study is on identifying the elements of community college student success courses, further analysis of results reported by CCCIS (2013) was warranted: of the nearly 150,000 students responding to a survey, only approximately 20% of students took advantage of a success course in their first semester. These numbers were confirmed by a SENSE study (CCCIS, 2012), findings of which revealed that only about 29% of first-time first-semester student engaged in some type of success courses in their first semester. Although a large proportion of institutions, nearly 83–84% (CCCSE 2012; CCIS, 2011) offered

success courses, only approximately 15–20% of these institutions mandated their first-year first-semester student to take a success course or any of its components (CCCSE, 2013).

Finally, students who do become involved in some type of success course demonstrate, on average, a higher level of performance on benchmarks such as test scores, GPAs, semester completion, and next-semester enrollment. Although the number of first-semester first-year students participating in components of success course(s) has increased, the number of students participating is not increasing quickly enough to keep pace with the numbers of student who are dropping out and not obtaining the credentials necessary to be successful in the 21st-century workforce.

Leaders of community colleges are determined to do their part in closing the gap by training a skilled workforce. Closing the gap will require a significant increase in the number of graduates from postsecondary institutions, particularly by underrepresented populations and minority, first-generation, and non-traditional-aged students. Because of the diverse array of educational backgrounds of learners in community colleges, leaders of these institutions are becoming more committed to specialized courses that are designed to assist students in reaching their desired college outcomes. Nevertheless, the question remains, are these success program and or course(s) performing by achieving intended outcomes? This section discusses (a) the need for program evaluation, (b) styles and models of evaluation, and (c) Stufflebeam's (2002) CIPP theory of evaluation.

Need for Program Evaluation

Demands for accountability and transparency are emanating from various stakeholders, specifically federal and state governing agencies, accrediting organizations, taxpayers, parents, students, and the workforce at large. Since, workforce readiness has become an increasing

concern, particularly in light of declining college completion numbers and the widening gap for skilled labors. Concentration on accountability has broadened and is becoming a major component toward successful programing, creating even greater pressure and greater need for resolutions.

President Obama (2009) declared the need for America to regain its leadership position among nations in postsecondary degree attainment. There is an acknowledged need for student completion rates to increase. With these needs comes added culpability on behalf of institutions to validate the effectiveness of practices such as student success courses. There is a need for accountability and assurance that success courses are achieving goals of advancing students, which requires sustained attention to quality of established courses. The quality of a program and its product, degreed graduates, can best be ascertained by means of evaluation.

Course evaluation provides an opportunity to assess and improve upon learners' outcomes and institutional effectiveness. Evaluating provides data that allow administrators to answer stakeholders' concerns pertaining to success or lack thereof. Course evaluation helps to determine the status of planned goals and objectives initially set to assist students in successful completion. As Nunley, Bers, and Manning (2011) remarked, "Assessment in community college presents an array of opportunities and challenges distinctive to these institutions and the students that they serve" (p. 3). Program evaluation can address the emergent question of what components of success courses are most effective in fostering student goals achievement.

Evaluation is important for determining the value, worth, and impact of success courses. The need for evaluation is especially important for first-semester first-year success courses because information resulting from such evaluation will contribute to needed transparency, accountability, and ultimately student completion. Accountability is essential for supporting

evidence-based decision-making processes that can lead to program improvement (Ewell, 2009). Evidence is necessary to determine and document strengths as well as weaknesses, efficiencies, and deficiencies in the success courses offered. Customarily, evaluation involves a systematic and organized approach to collecting and analyzing program outcomes. Programmatic evaluation contributes to better understanding of student outcomes, provides opportunities to revisit program goals, allows for appropriate reallocation of funds (when necessary), enables the public to be informed, and encourages support for program guidelines (Ewell, 2009). Friedman (2012) remarked,

Assessment is imperative for other reasons. In addition to demonstrating to others what we are doing, assessment (a) assists in funding requests; (b) informs planning and decision making; (c) helps to make inferences about overall quality of a program or educational approach; (d) allows us to celebration of successes; and (e) most importantly, provides a method of continuous improvement whereby we can modify and improve our programs. (Friedman, 2012, p. xi)

Before the benefits of program assessments can be realized, all stakeholders must understand the different approaches and techniques used in the evaluation or assessment. There must be an understanding of how findings will be used and how findings will be disseminated. Approaches can vary from formative to summative, from rubrics to surveys, to a variety of performance evaluations. Not only do evaluation approaches vary, but also the application of evaluations assessment models vary.

Formative evaluation is also known as process or implementation evaluation. This evaluation approach is performed with an emphasis on procedural and schematic knowledge of how programs are being implemented. As Penza et al. (2009) explained, “Formative assessment purpose is: ‘to provide direct feedback about the learning and teaching process’” (p. 297).

Whereas formative evaluation is focused on processes, summative evaluation is more concerned with program outcomes. Summative evaluation, also known as outcome evaluation, is

performed to document the results or outcomes of programs. Consequently, “the results of summative evaluations can specify program status and conditions for accountability purposes” (Wall, 2004, p. 1).

Performance evaluations are another approach to evaluation utilized to assess programs. In performance evaluations, the major concern is service delivery. As Gelmon, Foucek, and Waterbury (2005) remarked, “For performance monitoring to be useful, measures must be meaningful, understandable, balanced, and comprehensive” (p. 7).

Several models are available for obtaining evidence-based feedback. Some of these models include the following:

- Kirkpatrick’s (1994) four-level model, which yields feedback on (a) reaction, or whether and how well learners appreciate the learning process; (b) learning, or the extent to which the learner gained knowledge and skills; (c) behavior, or whether learner’s can demonstrate changes as a result of the learning process, and (d) results, or what the concrete outcomes are as a result of the program.
- Patton’s (1997) utilization-focused program evaluation model, which “describes an evaluation process for making decisions about the content, focus and methods of an evaluation” (Patton, 1990, p. 121).
- Astin’s (1999) IEO model, described earlier in this chapter.
- Stufflebeam’s (1985, 2007) theory of context, input, process, product (CIPP), described below.

Stufflebeam’s CIPP Model

For the present research, Stufflebeam’s (2007) program evaluation theory was employed. Stufflebeam’s theory was formulated in 1966 at The Ohio State University Evaluation Center. As

Stufflebeam (2007) explained, “The CIPP evaluation model is a comprehensive framework for guiding evaluations of programs, projects, personnel, products, institutions, and systems” (p. 1). The four components—context, input, process, and product evaluation— are the core of the theory. Each component can be viewed separately in program evaluation as answering questions such as, *what needs to be done? How should it be done? Is it being done? Did it succeed?* Stufflebeam’s (1999) model is popular in educational program evaluation because of its simplicity. The four components of Stufflebeam’s model are described below.

Context evaluation. Context evaluation is focused on exams and describes program components being evaluated. Specifically, context evaluation addresses the needs, goals, sufficiency of the objectives as they relate to the program needs, and general program-planning decisions. According to Stufflebeam (2007), “Context evaluation assesses needs, assets, and problems within a defined environment” (p. 4). The focus of contextual evaluation focus is on pre-implementation, providing a comprehensive picture to aid in program implementation. Table 8 enumerates activities involved in applying the CIPP Model:

Table 8. Context Evaluation Activities

Task	Details
1	Compiling and assess background information on the intended beneficiaries’ needs and assets from such sources as health records, school grades and test scores, funding proposals, and newspaper archives.
2	Interview program leaders to review and discuss their perspectives on beneficiaries’ needs and to identify any problems (political or otherwise) the program will need to solve.
3	Assess program goals in light of beneficiaries’ assessed needs and potentially useful assets.
4	Request that program staff regularly make available to the evaluators information they collected on the program’s beneficiaries and environment.

Task	Details
5	As appropriate prepare and deliver to agreed-upon stakeholders a draft context report providing an update on program-related needs, assets, and problems, along with assessment of the program's goals and priorities.
6	Periodical, as appropriate, discuss context evaluation findings in feedback sessions.
7	Use the context evaluation findings in selecting and/or clarifying the intended beneficiaries.
8	Use the context evaluation findings in reviewing and revising as appropriate, the program's goals to assure they properly target assessed needs.
9	Uses the context evaluation findings-throughout and at the program's end-to help assess the program's effectiveness and significance in meeting beneficiaries' assessed needs.

Note. Adapted from Evaluation Checklists Project, by D. L. Stufflebeam, 2007, p. 4.

Whereas context evaluations are programmatic components within the program context, input evaluation, the second component of the model, involves assessing competing strategies and implementation of the working elements of the program. Input evaluation represents things such as program description, human and financial resources, and program design. Input evaluations support the process of structural decisions making. Stufflebeam's input activities are reflected in Table 9.

Table 9. Input Evaluation

Task	Details
1	Identify and investigate existing programs that could serve as a model for the contemplated program.
2	Assess the proposed strategy of the program for responsiveness to assessed needs and feasibility.
3	Assess the budget of the program for sufficiency to fund the needed work.
4	Assess the merit of the work plan and schedule of the program for sufficiency, feasibility, and political viability.
5	Use the input evaluation findings to devise a program strategy that is scientifically, economically, socially, politically, and technologically defensible.
6	Use the input findings to assure the strategy of the program is feasible for meeting the assessed needs.

Task	Details
7	Use the input evaluation findings for accountability purposes in reporting the rationale for the selected program strategy and the defensibility of the operational plan.

Equally important in Stufflebeam's theory is process evaluation, the third component.

Process evaluation is focused on program monitoring, documents, and any assessment programs and program activities. This component is essentially an evaluation of the implemented program. It is in the process evaluation component that performance and auditing typically takes place. Guidelines and policy assurance are typically addressed as part of process evaluation, allowing for reviewing and restructuring when necessary. Process evaluations activities are delineated in Table 10.

Table 10. Process Evaluation

Task	Details
1	Collaborate with the program staff, and maintain a record of program events, problems, costs, and allocations.
2	Periodically interview beneficiaries, program leaders, and staff to obtain their input on program progress.
3	Maintain an up-to-date profile of the program.
4	Periodically draft written reports on process evaluation findings and provide the draft reports.
5	Present and discuss evaluation findings in feedback workshops.
6	Use the process evaluation findings to coordinate and strengthen staff activities.
7	Use the process evaluation findings to the program design.
8	Use the process evaluation findings to maintain a record of the progress of the program.
9	Use the process evaluation findings to report on the progress of the program to the financial sponsor, policy board, community members, and developers of the program.

Product Evaluation

Characteristically, product evaluation or impact evaluation assesses program target audience, quality and significance of outcomes, sustainability, and transportability (Stufflebeam, 2007). Product evaluation frequently involves general and specific program outcomes. Product evaluation taxonomy incorporates psychological and behavioral outcomes involving cognitive and affective items. Production evaluations typically measures anticipated outcomes, program benefits, program cost, and effectiveness and identifies unanticipated outcomes (Friedman, 2012).

Summary

Chapter 2 presented a review of literature regarding the identification of components of first-year first-semester college success course(s) specifically designed to foster success in community colleges. Prior to reviewing literature concentrating on success course(s) it was

necessary to provide the context of community colleges. The historical overview of community colleges encompassed (a) the early development and expansion of community colleges, (b) the GI Bill, (c) the Truman Commission, and the (d) the Higher Education Act, and the involvement of each of these elements in the mission of community colleges.

The chapter also provided (a) a view of community colleges from a national and state perspective, (b) the current issues impeding student success, (c) the identification of student success course(s) and the common components, and (d) concerns apprehensions surrounding success course(s). In addition, the chapter also presented a theoretical framework for the research.

The theoretical framework for the research was presented as a review of three lenses: two theories and one set of principles. The first theory was that of Astin (1999) and a review of his theory of student involvement. Astin's core concept of IEO as well as his five postulates were reviewed. The second lens for the framework reviewed was the CCCSE seven principles for student success. These seven principles are (a) a strong start, (b) a clear and coherent pathway, (c) integrated support, (d) high expectations and high support, (e) intensive student engagement, (f) design scale, and (g) professional development. Finally, there was a review of Stufflebeam's theory of program evaluation. This review introduced Stufflebeam's four components of program evaluation: context, input, process, and product. The discussion concluded with relevance of evaluation for analyzing the research findings of student success courses.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 presented information surrounding student success course(s) and the effectiveness of the components. The present research strives to identify components of first-year first-semester success courses that foster success. The research findings

can provide information and knowledge that may be beneficial to administrators in planning and implementation as well as in students' persistence and time to completion.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter presents the overall criteria and explanations for the design of the study. The study methodology provides a rationale for the processes and procedures that were employed and establishes the steps taken to support the rigor of the study. The motivation for selection of the research design is governed by the research purpose, as well as the driving questions. A qualitative paradigm situated in the interpretive paradigm utilizing a case study methodology was selected as most appropriate to explore and identify the components of first-year first-semester college success courses specifically designed to foster student success in single-campus Illinois community colleges.

Included in this chapter is an explanation and rationale for (a) selection of the qualitative paradigm and the interpretive paradigm; (b) selection of the case study methodology; (c) selection sites and participants protocols; (d) data collection and processes; (e) data analysis procedures and strategies; (f) ethical considerations; (g) and steps taken to ensure trustworthiness and validity of the research. The chapter concludes with limitations of the research, information on the researcher as the instrument, and the chapter summary.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to identify the components of first-year first-semester college success courses specifically designed to foster student success in single-campus Illinois community colleges. The driving questions that guided this research are as follows

1. What catalysts are instrumental to the implementation of the college success course(s)?
2. How are the overall design and the components of the college success course(s) selected?

3. How and in what way does the college success course maintain quality and validity?
4. How is the impact of the college success course evaluated and demonstrated?

Research Inquiry

Qualitative Paradigm

There are three principal paradigms in research: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods design (utilizing a combination of quantitative and qualitative approach). Quantitative and qualitative paradigms are more commonly used than are mixed methods approaches.

Research paradigms are based on different fundamental assumptions, concepts, and the values believed by researchers of the particular paradigm (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). In reviewing the characteristics of both quantitative and qualitative paradigms, the researcher determined that a qualitative case study inquiry situated in an interpretive paradigm was most appropriate for this study. A qualitative case study was employed to identify the components of first-year, first-semester college success courses, consequently providing pertinent information specifically designed to foster student success in single-campus Illinois community colleges.

As the use of the qualitative research approach has been embraced, many researchers have written extensively regarding the contrasts between quantitative and qualitative paradigms. Among the researchers who have written about the differences are Creswell (2008), Johnson and Christensen (2008), and Lincoln and Guba (1994). Their viewpoints, definitions, and explanations of qualitative research have several commonalities: (a) the approach is used when little is known of the research topic; (b) the research is from the participants' perspective; (c) rich, thick data and information are collected from multiple sources, primarily in words and text, in the nature setting; and (d) the findings are analyzed for patterns and themes.

Qualitative research involves the use of various approaches to explore an unknown phenomenon. When little or nothing of the phenomenon is known, employing the qualitative paradigm can assist the researcher to gain a better understanding of the specific topic. Johnson and Christensen (2008) stated that a “qualitative researcher’s approach is broad like that of an explorer who digs deeply into a phenomenon to discover, construct and describe what was encountered” (p. 35). Qualitative research generally attempts to explore, identify, or describe the phenomena using a variety of methods, consequently fostering a wide-angle view that ultimately allows for examining the depth and breadth of the phenomenon. Creswell (2007) believed it is appropriate to use a qualitative research process when (a) there is an issue or problem that needs examining, (b) when there is a need for detailed understanding of a phenomenon/issue, and (c) when findings can provide critical and useful insight to a setting in which a problem is found. Merriam (2009) argued that qualitative research is “intended to systematically describe the facts and characteristics of a given phenomenon or the relationships between the events and phenomena” (p. 5).

Qualitative research attempts to gain information and data to garner an understanding of how and/or what study participants feel or believe about a topic from their personal perspective. It is particularly designed to discover how participants make meaning of an experience or situation. Merriam (2009) stated, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). Creswell (2007) concurred with Merriam and emphasized discovery of the participants’ perspectives of their experience, stating,

In the entire qualitative research process, the researchers keep a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or writers from the literature. (Creswell, 2007, p. 39)

The challenge to discover how participants construct meaning from their experiences also promotes the collection of rich, thick data and information from a variety of data sources. In qualitative research, data can be collected from a wide array of sources, such as interviews, focus groups, surveys, documents, artifacts, field notes, and journals, as well as other sources (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Yin, 2003). Furthermore, Creswell (2008) described data collection for qualitative research used in educational research as follows:

A type of educational research in which the researcher relies on the views of participants; asks broad, general questions; collection of data consisting largely of words (or text) from participants; describes and analyzes these words for themes; and conducts the inquiry in a subjective based manner. (Creswell, 2008, p. 46)

Quantitative research is often referred to as the scientific method and is considered a “top-down” research approach. Numerical data are collected to investigate a hypothesis or problem, which is substantiated with quantified statistical data. Findings in quantitative research are used to prove causal relationships and to make inferential predictions with an ultimate goal of replication of the study.

Conversely, qualitative research is noted as a “bottom-up” approach to research. It is fundamentally a scientific approach that usually involves collection of non-numerical data and information in a natural setting. With the use of a natural setting, the research design does not include variables that are manipulated by the researcher. Rather, a natural setting allows study participants to offers insights into their view of the research topic and illuminates meaning from their perspective. Guba and Lincoln (1994) viewed the use of natural settings in qualitative research as gathering information or observations of participants “as they really are, and as they really work” (p. 107). Interestingly, Merriam (1998) stated that, “in contrast to quantitative research, which takes apart a phenomenon to examine components (which become the variables

of the study), qualitative research can reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole” (p. 6).

It is the data and information collected from multiple sources that allow for triangulation of the data during data analysis. This process provides a logical and systematic technique to sort, categorize, and code the data. During analysis of the research data and information collected, patterns and themes emerge, leading to an understanding of the phenomenon under study. As Creswell (2007) explained, “Throughout the slow process of collecting data and analyzing them, we shape our narrative—a narrative with many forms in qualitative research. We tell a story that unfolds over time” (p. 43).

Because this research is situated in a qualitative paradigm, it strives to explore and provide insights to better understand the components of first-year, first-semester college success courses, and foster student success, ultimately increasing student completion rates. Furthermore, the use of the qualitative research approach was most appropriate because there remains a need for a better understanding of the topic and the findings can provide critical and useful insight. Creswell’s assessment of the appropriateness of utilization of qualitative researcher provided credibility for the use of a qualitative paradigm for this research because the design provided an opportunity to (a) investigate emerging issues and trends of components of success courses, (b) understand current components of first-year first-semester college success course in select Illinois community colleges and (c) provide information to improve college success courses in order to foster student persistence and increase retention, both of which have an impact on college completion rates, workforce readiness, and society as a whole.

Interpretive Paradigm

This qualitative research was situated within the interpretive paradigm. Interpretive research is an approach that recognizes the self-reflective nature and the researcher as the interpreter of the data (Creswell, 2007). The interpretive paradigm takes into account the viewpoints or lenses of two groups of people: the study participants and the researcher. Essentially, interpretation of the data and information gathered for the study is filtered by the lens of each group, which consists of their personal background, experiences, expertise, race, culture, and whatever has touched their lives. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), through the interpretive paradigm lens, the researcher “understands that research is an interaction process shaped by his or her own personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and by those of the people in the setting” (p. 6).

Merriam (2009) further illuminated the interpretive research paradigm, stating, “Interpretive research assumes that reality is socially constructed, there is no single, observable reality. Rather, there are ‘multiple realities’, or interpretations, of a single event” (Merriam, 2009, p. 8). Therefore, both the participants’ and the researcher’s lens are prominent in the qualitative paradigm. It is the obligation of the researcher to not only understand the participants’ world, but also to interpret the data with knowledge of the participants’ historical backgrounds and cultural norms. Further, it is the researcher’s responsibility to provide a clear and concise audit trail of sufficient data in support of findings, allowing readers to ascertain whether all or some of the outcomes are transferable to their particular community college. Identification of components of first-year first-semester college success courses specifically designed to foster student success in community colleges is significant to student retention and college completion rates. Therefore, a

qualitative inquiry situated in the interpretive paradigm was the most appropriate approach to accomplish this study.

Methodology

Case Study

A case study approach was appropriate because it is holistic, takes into consideration data from all groups and their interaction, maximizes the discovery of emergent issues and trends, and can be a single- or multiple-case design. A case study methodology provides an opportunity to view the phenomenon from the perspective of all participants. Fegain, Orum, and Sjoberg (1990) declared that a case study is appropriate when the researcher is striving toward a holistic understanding of a phenomenon. In addition, Yin (1994) expressed that a case study methodology is suitable and recommended when the research project design includes the following sections:

(a) overview of the project, project objectives, and case study issues; (b) field procedures, credentials, and access to sites; (c) specific questions that the investigator must keep in mind during data collection; and (d) guide for the report, outline format for the narrative. (Yin, 1994, p. 64)

In addition, the use of a case study methodology was appropriate because it is characterized by being descriptive, allowing for the gathering of rich, data and information regarding the phenomenon being study. A case study can also enhance clarification of the phenomenon. It portrays a greater understanding of the phenomenon from a wide-angle lens and narrows it down to a single lens while exploring and uncovering themes and/or categories.

A case study design was appropriately employed because essential to all case studies is the existence of a bounded system. Stake (2005) defined a case study as “a choice of what is to be studied” (p. 435), denoting *what* as a bounded system. Furthermore, a case study bounded system is characterized as particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic (Merriam, 2009). As a

bounded system, a case study represents a unit that is framed; therefore, the study delineates what phenomena are being studied and what are excluded from the study. Essentially, this frame consists of the study purpose, place, and time the study was undertaken. Creswell (2008) views the case study as a phenomenon under study situated or bounded within the parameters of the study, such as a program, group, or institution. This research was bounded by the purpose, the guiding questions, the selection criteria, and the conceptual framework. Merriam (2009) maintained,

If the phenomenon you are interested in studying is not intrinsically bounded, it is not a case study. One technique for assessing the boundedness of the topic is to ask how finite the data collection would be, that is, whether there is a limit to the number of people involved who could be interviewed or a finite time for observations. If there is no end, actually or theoretically, to the number or people who could be interviewed or to observations that could be conducted, then the phenomenon is not bounded enough to qualify as a case. (Merriam, 2009, p. 41)

Stake (1995) concurred with Merriam (2009), Creswell (2008), and Yin (2003), believing that establishing a boundary is important to prevent researchers from the tendency of attempting to answer questions that are too broad or include too many issues for one study. Knowledge gained as a consequence of case studies is distinct from other sources of research. Stake (1981) acknowledged four characteristics that set case studies apart from other research. Case studies are “(a) more concrete, as the knowledge resonates from experience; (b) more contextual, experiences are rooted in the context; (c) more developed by researcher interpretation, readers bring their experiences; and (d) based on reference populations as determined by the reader, readers have a pre-determined population in mind” (Stake, 1981, pp. 35–36).

In summary, a case study was considered appropriate for identifying the components of first-year first-system success courses/course(s) because case studies are considered to be holistic, grounded, and heuristic. In being heuristic, a case study can contribute to the discovery of new meanings, develop a richer experience, and confirm prior understanding and knowledge.

In case studies, participants bring their experiences from their particular perspectives' and viewpoints. This case study provides support and information for success courses in community colleges and complied with the criterion of three experts in case study research:

- Stake (1981): The research identifies new knowledge which is critical to success course/course(s).
- Yin (2003): The research meets the four conditions for case study selection.
- Merriam (2009): The research is conducted within a bounded system.

Case Selection

Purposeful Sampling and Others

For this research, the participating community colleges were selected by means of purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling, also known as criterion and non-probability sampling, involves selecting participants who best understand the phenomenon being studied. Purposeful sampling provides an opportunity for greater depth and breadth of understanding by robustly exploring a topic and discovering the meaning constructed by those participants knowledgeable of the topic. Creswell (2007) describes purposeful sampling as “the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 125). Merriam (2009) concurred, stating that “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator(s) wants to discover understand and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned,” (p. 77). Purposeful sampling uses a predetermined set of criteria carefully chosen to acquire the maximum amount of information from the participants. It is this focus on a homogeneous selection of participants and sites rich with information that assisted in understanding what help was being provided by Illinois community colleges for first-semester college success courses.

Not only was purposeful sampling employed for this study, but also a maximum variation selection strategy was applied. The additional use of maximum variation allowed for a wider, more diverse perspective for a deeper and richer understanding of this research topic. Merriam (2009) described the technique of maximum variation as “purposefully seeking variation or diversity in sample selection for a greater range of application of the findings by consumers of the research” (p. 229). Patton (2002) expanded the understanding of maximum variation as “Any common patterns that emerge from the great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon” (p. 234).

This study also used maximum variation in the selection of both sites and participants. Maximum variation criteria were applied to the pool of those respondents who agreed to the request for a face-to-face interview and who were employed by a single-campus operating structure. This combined use of purposeful sampling and maximum variations resulted in the identification of common themes across more diverse samples and provides greater transferability.

Site Selection

The criteria for site selections for this study of Illinois community colleges were based on three factors: (a) geographic location (urban, suburban, and rural), (b) full-time student enrollment, and (c) single-campus administrative structure. The ICCB has completed this type of designation by organizing the 49 community colleges into peer groups. Seven peer group designations are based on college geographic location: three major regions (southern, central and northern), financial data, and college full-time enrollments. Enrollments are characterized by headcount enrollment of (a) less than 3,000; (b) 3,000–4,000 downstate, in or near communities

of less than 50,000 populations; (c) 4,000 or greater and downstate community population 50,000 or less; and (d) 10,000 or more. The final factor of the purposeful sampling site selection was the ICCB designation of a single-campus administrative management system. Single-campus management system refers a community college reporting system of involving a solitary president. Illinois has two community college systems: the City College of Chicago and Illinois Eastern Community College with a combined total of 11 colleges. Therefore, only 37 single-campus colleges were eligible to take part in the study.

The protocol for selection of participating site was completed in two phases. Phase 1 was to petition the 37 community college administrators of student affairs to complete an online survey. In Phase 2 of the site selection process, site selections for the face-to-face interviews were determined by a positive response on an initial survey to a request to participate in a face-to-face interview. Because the seven City Colleges of Chicago comprise one of the ICCB peer groups, only colleges in the remaining six groups were eligible for the study. Therefore, the study interviews were conducted with one person from each of the six peer groups, being careful to ensure representation equated to two institutions in the southern region, two institutions from the central region, and two from the northern regions. In addition, great care was taken to represent urban, rural, small, medium, and large populations. Table 11 identifies the purposeful sampling selection and maximum variation characteristics.

Table 11. Characteristics for Purposeful Sampling and Maximum Variation

Sequential ID	Characteristics	Organization membership	Purposeful sampling/ maximum variation	Rationale
1	Organizational membership	ICCB	Purposeful sampling	Identifies members VP student
2	Regional boundary	Single-campus ICCB	Purposeful sampling/ maximum variation	Identifies campuses with single management system
3	Geographic location	ICCB peer group	Maximum variation	Creates variation in identification of regions

Participant Selection

In qualitative research, there are no set rules as to how large or how many participants or sampling size is needed. Patton (1990) stated, “sample size depends on what you want to know” (p 184). This research sought to gain information and insights from one participant from each of the remaining six ICCB designated peer groups. Therefore, six face-to-face interviews were conducted with administrators who are the most knowledgeable regarding the history of success course/course(s) at their various institutions. It has also been suggested that the numbers of participants should provide “reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study” (Patton, 1990, p 186). Each participant in this research was geographically dispersed and thus met the site selection criteria to satisfy the greatest maximum variation and to strengthen the discovery and identification of any emergent themes and trends.

Participant Contact Protocol

To maintain consistency in data collection process, a participant contact protocol was designed and implemented. Yin (2009) explained that a protocol is necessary for three reasons:

(a) the protocol contains the instrument but also contains the procedures and general rules to be followed; (b) the protocol is directed at an entirely different party than that of a survey questionnaire; (c) the protocol is a major way of increasing the reliability of a case study. (Yin, 2009, p. 79)

The web survey designed for this study was directed to only the 37 single-campus management system colleges in the ICCB peer institution groups. Based on the completion of initial survey Question 22, one administrator from each institution was selected to participate in the semi-structured interview, thus allowing for six community colleges administrators to be contacted. The design of the protocol aided in providing validity and an audit trail for the study. Table 12 delineates the participants' sequential protocol utilized for this research.

Table 12. Research Inquiry Participants' Sequential Protocol

Timeline	Task
October 2012	Secured a list of all (37) VPs of student affairs / development.
November 2012	Phoned all VPs' offices to obtain the names and numbers of those qualified to be participants. Called participants to introduce the web survey. Sent out web survey to either the VPs or their designees, deans, or program coordinators at all 37 colleges.
December 2012	Sent out a reminder to institutions that did not complete the survey to go online and complete the survey. Identified one institution from each the six peer groups' institution that met the design criteria to contact and set up for a face-to-face interview.
January 2013	Called to set up appointments for the six face-to-face-interviews. During the interview, collected any program documents the interviewees were willing to share.
February 2013	Confirmed face-to-face interviews. Sent a copy of interview questions and consent agreement one week before interview. Day before interview, e-mailed confirmation of time and place.

Data Collection Pilot

In the quest to improve the research process and to identify any problems or irregularities with the interview questions, protocol, and online survey questions a pilot study was conducted. Three content experts with a doctorate and employed in student affairs areas of the community college were selected to provide a peer review. The pilot study feedback provided an opportunity to make necessary adjustment to both the interview questions as well as the survey questions. In addition, completion of a pilot study for the data collection methods provided an opportunity for the researcher to improve her interviewing skills.

As a result of the pilot study, only one additional question was suggested to be added to the interview questions, "Is there anything else you would like to say about your program?" All pilot data and information collected was destroyed and not used as data for the research.

Data Collection Methods

According to Merriam (2009), “The data collection techniques used, as well as the specific information considered to be ‘data’ in a study, are determined by the researcher’s theoretical orientation, by the problem and purpose of the study, and by the sample selected” (p. 86). Johnson and Christensen (2008) contributed that, “qualitative research data is subjective and both personally and socially interpreted” and “the quality of the data is directly correlated to the quality of the researcher’s data collection methods, perspective, and interpretations” (pp. 34–35).

Data in qualitative inquiry typically are represented by rich descriptive words in a narrative, whereas, in a quantitative paradigm, statistical data are the chief source of data representation (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, to maximize the depth and breadth of this qualitative research, data collection consisted of four primary methods: (a) survey, (b) semi-structured interview, (c) document review, and (d) field notes. Creswell (2008), Fontana and Frey (2005), and Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintained that interviews, surveys, and document reviews are major approaches in the production of a rich narrative. Patton (1999) and Yin (2003) contributed that the hallmark of case study research lies within the use of a variety of data sources. Data collection sources and method technique are highlighted in Table 13.

Table 13. Four Data Collection Sources Implemented for Study

Data source	Method	Data collection technique
Community college VPs, directors, coordinators of student affairs, or the most appropriate personnel in student success course	Surveys	Online survey using Google Surveys to identify success components and emerging trends
Community college VPs, directors, or most appropriate personnel	Semi-structured interviews	Face-to-face interviews lasting from 1 hour in length, recorded and transcribed
Illinois community college organizational charts and other documents	Documents	Charts, maps and other documents gathered from all

Data source	Method	Data collection technique
Field notes	Researcher's notes	participants who complete the face-to-face interviews. Observation and reflection from researcher's interview.

Survey

The web-based survey (see Appendix A) was used to gather similar information from the 37 community colleges, consequently “enabling researcher to simultaneously answer exploratory and confirmatory questions and thereby verifying and generating theory about complex social phenomena” (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2003, p. 62). Pertinent demographic, personal, and program information were obtained from participants by this survey. The web-based survey consisted of two sections: demographic information and programmatic information. The web-based survey

- generated demographic data, which assisted in contextualizing the data and information obtained;
- confirmed the qualifications and experiences of the success course administrator;
- provided valuable information concerning the identification of components of student success courses of the various institutions; and
- provided contact information as to which institution success course administrators were amenable to participating in a face-to-face interview.

All four aspects were important to know in order to facilitate gathering of data and information for a deeper understanding of the success components of student success courses.

The online survey was administered utilizing Google's Surveys.com (www.survs.com). Google Surveys is a user-friendly, web-based survey tool that provides a variety of survey designs. It also provides web support, survey distribution, and can assist with survey analysis. Initially, surveys were distributed and allowed for a 3-week period for completion.

Semi-structured Interviews

In qualitative research, the interview is often the most popular method of data collection to obtain a rich, in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The interview questions were derived from the research guiding questions so that the appropriate data and information were gathered (see Appendix B). The premise of semi-structured interviews is that the interviewee possesses background knowledge, perceptions, insights, and rich experiences concerning the phenomenon being studied. Patton (2002) contended that “Interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (p. 341).

Merriam (2009) states, interview are necessary when “we cannot observe behaviors, feelings, or how people interpret the world” (p. 88). According to Fontana and Frey (2005), the interview is relied on “as a source of information, with the assumption that interviewing results is a true and accurate picture of the respondents’ selves and lives” (pp. 698–699). Semi-structured interviews are a design involving opened-ended questions, which permits participants to provide their own perspective pertaining to the research topic while engaging in a conversational atmosphere. Merriam (2009) stated, “Less structures formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways” (p. 90). Additionally, the preferred conversational atmosphere provided the researcher an opportunity to probe, clarify, and gather pertinent information.

Throughout the interview process, the researcher had specific responsibilities. Yin (2009) asserted,

Throughout the interview process, you have two jobs: (a) to follow your own line of inquiry, as reflected by your case study protocol, and (b) to ask your actual (conversational) questions in an unbiased manner that also serves the needs of your line of inquiry. (Yin, 2009, p. 106)

The face-to-face interview questions allowed for the free exploration of emerging trends and issues in components of student success courses. Furthermore, semi-structured interview permitted the probing of responses for more understanding and clarification.

To guarantee consistency among the six interviews, an interview protocol was employed. After receipt of the initial web-based survey, the six individuals meeting the study selection criteria were contacted. This meeting allowed for the following activities: (a) an introduction of the researcher; (b) provide information regarding the research topic; (c) provide a suggested time for the face-to-face interview; (d) set possible appointments for the interview; and (e) and obtain permission to record the session. In addition, following a phone confirmation, an e-mail message was also sent. The e-mail message allowed the participants a preview of the interview questions and the consent form, as well as an opportunity to gather relevant documents for the researcher.

Documents

Merriam (2009), Creswell (2007), and Patton (1990, 2002) all concurred that, for case study research, documents are used to “corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (Yin, 2009, p. 103). Because of the variety of these types of community college student success courses, many different types of documents were available. These documents could have taken many forms, such as memoranda, agendas, formal college reports, and studies. Each document had the potential of providing rich, thick data. Patton (1990) declared that, “in contemporary society all programs leave a trail of paper that the evaluator can follow and use to increase knowledge and understanding about the program” (p. 233). Documents were used to (a) support information gathered from other sources (i.e., surveys and interviews); (b) provide a source for multiply viewing/reviewing of relevant information; (c) provide names of stakeholders and

organizational involvements; and (d) provide references to event details. Yin (2009) declared three major reasons why documents are important:

First, documents are helpful in verifying the correct spellings and titles or names of organizations that might have been mentioned in the interview. Second, documents can provide other specific details to corroborate information from other sources. Third, you can make inferences from documents. (Yin, 2009, p. 103)

Document reviews can also provide an opportunity to create rich, thick narratives.

Merriam (1998) asserts that data “obtained in interviews and observation and can furnish descriptive information verify emerging hypothesis, advance new categories and hypothesis, offer historical understanding, track changes and development” (p. 126). Interview participants were asked to share copies of documents that could increase the understanding and reasoning for establishing components of student success courses/course(s). Organizational flow charts were examined to determine the relationship of the success components with other college programs and departments. Furthermore, web sites of the six colleges involved in participant interviews were reviewed for pertinent information regarding components of student success courses.

Field Notes

In qualitative research, field notes are generally rich and descriptive and can be both observable and reflective. Field notes permit a detailed summarization of the interview, describing the participant, his or her behaviors, and the setting. Creswell (2007) indicated that “the observer’s attempt to summarize, in chronological fashion, the flow of activities” (p. 138) should be completed immediately or as quickly as possible following the interview. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) agreed, noting, “the more time that passes between observing and recording the notes the poorer your recall will be and the less likely you will ever get to record your data” (p. 127).

Field notes presented a shift from a wide-angle to a narrow-angle perspective, meaning the goal was focused on the participant and any information that could be collected from the brief but powerful encounter. Observer's comments led to the reflective nature of field notes. Reflective comments allowed for feelings, reactions, hunches, interpretations, and speculation from the researcher's perspective (Merriam, 2009). A protocol was followed after each of the six face-to-face interviews. Field notes protocol included identifying:

- location of the interview,
- date of the interview,
- time of the interview,
- length of the interview,
- position of the interviewee,
- descriptive notes,
- reflective notes, and
- a sketch of the physical appearance of the room

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, substantial amounts of data are gathered from various data sources. From the beginning to the end of the study data collection process, data are being analyzed. Therefore, data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously. According to Stake (1995), "There is no particular moment when data analysis begins. Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as final compilations" (Stake, 1995, p. 71). The compilation and interpretation of data in a meaningful way is complex and challenging.

The massive amounts of data collected in qualitative research can be overwhelming. In order to manage the amount of different data collected in preparation for data analysis, a logical

and systematic process was needed. Creswell (2007) introduced a data analysis spiral, which creates a structure that can assist in data management and allow for ease of analysis. The data analysis spiral provides channels or a pathway that allows analytical information to flow smoothly from the beginning process to the end, while extracting meaningful and useful information. Creswell's management system is composed of four stages: (a) data managing; (b) reading and memoing; (c) describing, classifying, and interpreting; and (d) representing and visualizing.

Stage 1: Data Managing

Data managing or the research organization stage is something that has to be developed and implemented at the inception of the data collection process. This stage also allows for the cleaning and verifying of the data obtained. Detailed dates and times were maintained for all data and documents and correct spelling of names and sites was confirmed. This accuracy began the audit trail and enhanced the process of data retrieval throughout data analysis.

To better protect, store, and manage the data, several procedures were instituted. For storage of the collected physical documents, individual expandable file folders were established for each institution. Each folder storing the documents for an institution was labeled with the name of the institution, all physical documents collected, as well as the names of the individuals interviewed. In addition, all documents and back-up CDs of the data were stored in a secure file cabinet to which only the researcher had access. A digital flash drive was populated to secure both computer-generated data and audio transcripts and kept offsite in a secure location.

Stage 2: Reading and Memoing

It was important to become familiar with all the data collected including documents, surveys, and interviews to create a more in-depth analytical understanding. Multiple readings of

all documents and transcripts was done to gain insight into to what was said and to view data from the lens of the study participants. During this process, memoing was begun and continued throughout data analysis. Memoing is an interactive conversation the researcher has with the data. Saldaña (2013) said memoing is:

M-Mapping research activities (documentation of the decision-making process of research design and implementation as an audit trail); E-Extracting meaning from the data (analysis and interpretation, concepts, assertions, theories); M-Maintaining momentum (researcher perspective and reflexivity throughout the evolutionary journey of the study); O- Opening communication (for research team member exchanges). (Saldaña, 2013, p. 50)

Memoing also provided the opportunity to enhance the accuracy of data collected. Specific to the interviews, this process involved a comparison of the transcribed audio recordings and the written transcript for accuracy and discrepancies. Member checking by the study participants was employed to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts. Ultimately, the memo notes were combined with notations of other documented memos and field notes, assisting in triangulation of data sources to validate findings. Memoing is never a single step process, but a multiple-step process. Therefore, triangulation of data assisted in increasing reliability, transparency, and accuracy of the data analysis process.

Stage 3: Describing, Classifying, and Interpreting

Describing, classifying, and interpreting is the natural progression from memoing. Typically, this process is conducted at the stage of data analysis, whereby themes, patterns, and categories are identified. This task is a breaking down data from large to smaller interrelated bits, in essence coding of data, promoting a clearer understanding of the data.

A priori themes gleaned from the conceptual framework of the study were used to analyze all data. However, great care was taken to remain open and attentive to the discovery of emerging additional patterns and themes. Creswell (2007) stated that, at this point in the spiral

analysis framework, “researchers describe in details, develop themes or dimensions through some classification system, and provide an interpretation in light of their own views or views of perspectives in the literature” (p. 151).

Stage 4: Representing and Visualizing

The fourth and final stage of Creswell’s (2007) data spiral is representing and visualizing. This stage refers to the presentation of findings in a visual manner. This step can assist in the creative discovery of themes and patterns elicited by rearranging what was produced as a result of the data analysis. Creswell (2007) indicated that this activity “is a process of pulling the data apart and putting them back together in more meaningful ways” (p. 163). When possible, findings were submitted as a visual representation to assist in the understanding and to help make meaning of certain aspects of the study. Johnson and Christensen (2008) submitted that visuals such as diagrams can be helpful in making sense of data. Therefore, a visual package could contain graphs, tables, charts, and illustrations to add credibility to the study findings.

Ethics

Within all steps of the qualitative research process, including the design, participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and reporting of findings, researchers can and do face many ethical issues (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). It became imperative that the researcher was always conscious of protecting and securing the rights, dignity, and welfare of all participants. Even through federal and institutional guidelines and codes of ethics have been developed, the research is only as ethically reliable as the researcher and his or her values. Yin (2009) indicated that, for ethical research to take place, two important principles must be adhered to: (a) participants should enter research studies voluntarily, with an understanding of the nature, obligation, and dangers; and (b) that participants should not be exposed to any undue risks.

The National Louis University Institutional Research Review Board (IRRB) application submission requires an overview of the purpose of the research; procedure for data collection; potential risk or benefits to participants; process of participant and site selections; and procedure for upholding and satisfying the code of Federal Regulations, Section 46.116; information consistent procedures and data storage. Prior to the beginning of the research process, approval was sought and obtained from the National Louis University IRRB.

The research involved two types of data collection methods: web survey and a face-to-face interview, both of which required a consent agreement. A consent agreement was embedded into the web survey and must have been agreed to by each of the 37 college success course administrators who wished to begin completing the survey. A copy of the survey is provided in Appendix A. Also, those participants agreeing to be interviewed were required to sign two consent agreements (see Appendix C) prior to their involvement. The interviewer retained one copy and the participant was given the other copy for his or her records.

A transcriptionist confidentiality agreement was provided for the transcriptionist prior to receiving any audio data files to transcribe (see Appendix D). The confidentiality agreement was put in place to ensure the safety of all audio documents while in the possession of the transcriptionist.

Although anonymity can never be 100% guaranteed, every precaution was employed to protect the identities of all institutions and participants. True identities of participants and sites were protected by using only fictitious names and locations in the narrative. Finally, storage for all documents was securely maintained by the researcher in a locked file and will be destroyed in 5–7 years after the end of the research project.

Trustworthiness and Validity

All researchers strive for trustworthiness in their research. As Merriam (1998) wrote, “Every researcher wants to contribute results that are believable and trustworthy” (p. 218). Trustworthiness provides support and proof of findings, regardless of the epistemological approach to the research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) declared that trustworthiness asserts that the research findings are “worth paying attention to” (p. 290). Table 14 provides an overview of some of more common methods of inquiry; these methods aided in providing trustworthiness, validity, and reliability in the present study.

Table 14. Strategies for Promoting Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research

Strategy	Description
Triangulation of data	Using multiple sources of data or data collection methods to corroborate findings. Validating that the data collected reflects the phenomena and the data’s reliability and dependable (yielding the same results on repeated trails).
Member checks	Allowing study participants to check, correct and thus validate data collected from interviews
Adequate engagement in data collection	Adequate time spent collecting data such that the data become “saturated” according to the study design. Not only saturated but also there must be confidence that the findings are true to substance credibility.
Researcher reflexivity	Critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationships to the study that may affect the investigation.
Peer review/examination	Discussions with colleagues regarding the process of study, the congruency of emerging findings with the raw data, and tentative interpretations.
Audit trail	A detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points in carrying out the study.
Rich, thick descriptions	Providing enough description to contextualize the study such that readers will be able to determine the extent to which their situation match the research context, and hence, the transferability of the findings. Confirming the findings as put forward by the respondents without bias from the researcher.

Strategy	Description
Maximum variation	Purposefully seeking variation or diversity in sample selection to allow for a greater range of application of the findings.

Note. Adapted from “Strategies from Promoting Validity and Reliability,” by S. B. Merriam, 2009, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (p. 229). Copyright 2009 by Jossey -Bass.

Proving trustworthiness is a rigorous and systematic process in qualitative research. To ensure trustworthiness and rigor in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (2005) suggested four indicators that must be considered (a) credibility, which involves confidence in the findings; (b) dependability, which involves the consistency of the findings with the data collected; (c) conformability, which involves the researcher acknowledging limitations, bias, and dilemmas encountered and the process entailed in transparency; and (d) transferability, which involves the relevancy of the findings that can be transferred to other contexts by the reader of the research. Therefore, trustworthiness was provided by various means throughout the study with substantiation of credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability.

Credibility

Credibility addresses the findings as being plausible and can be demonstrated by a rational research design, a sound conceptual and theoretical framework, purposeful sampling, and the phenomenon under study described in a logical manner and a description of the data and findings being coherent (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 1990). Assisting to establish credibility was the gathering of rich, thick, descriptive data collection, and analysis from multiply data sources. To increase credibility, this study employed triangulation of data to corroborate the findings. Triangulation allowed for the converging of information from different sources: interviews, surveys, document reviews, and artifacts to corroborate findings to obtain relevant information to then analyze. Creswell (2009) contended, “in triangulation, researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide

corroborating evidence” (p. 208), thus shedding light on new themes or perspectives. Merriam (2009), Miles and Huberman (1994), and Patton (1990) concurred that triangulation as a research method does substantiate themes, issues, and other new perspectives of the research and its findings.

Credibility was maintained using the following multiple data collection methods. The first was the online surveys of the 37 Illinois single-campus community colleges, which served as an external means of consistent data retrieval. The second method was use of face-to-face semi-structured interviews of six community college student success course/course(s) personnel who were individuals deemed by the vice presidents of the institutions as the most knowledgeable of the process in that specific college. Finally, documents were retrieved from the college websites or from the participants interviewed. Field notes were used as reflective commentary by the researcher throughout the research process. The assurance is that each data collection method provided rich, thick data that supported the purpose of the study and its accuracy, and thus the credibility of the findings.

Another strategy to support credibility was membership checking. Member checking is a process that allows study participants to check, correct, and validate information from the interview. Member checking asks the question, Are these your words? (Merriam, 2009).

Dependability

Dependability is Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) second indicator for trustworthiness. Dependability is equivalent to the consistency of the research process. According to Shenton (2004), “In addressing the issue of reliability, the positivist employs techniques to show that, if the work were repeated, in the same context, with the same methods and with the same participants, similar results would be obtained” (p. 71). Contact protocols were established,

interview questions and the interview process were developed and were adhered to, ensuring data collection consistency. Lincoln and Guba also stressed the close ties between credibility and dependability, arguing that, in practice, a demonstration of the former goes some distance in ensuring the latter. “This may be achieved through the use of overlapping methods, such as surveys and individual interview” (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). Further, research design and implementation were strategically executed to increase the dependability of the study and to provide an inquiry audit trail.

Confirmability

Confirmability, the third indicator, encompasses the logical progression of the research. Confirmability assured the research design was transparent and provided an audit trail, by explaining what transpired throughout each step of the study, including an account of the method, procedure, and decision points. The study design included a detailed description of research implementation and the data collection process to ensure scrutiny by readers, thus enhancing the audit trail. Merriam (2009) stated that the qualitative audit trail is utilized, “Just as an auditor authenticates the accounts of a business, independent readers can authenticate the findings of study by following the trail of the researcher” (p. 222). Confirmability was also validated by means of reflexivity by the researcher and acknowledgement of limitations and how each was minimized. Furthermore, tables, charts, graphs, and illustrations were incorporated to intensify transparency and ease of comprehension of the data collected and the findings.

Transferability

Transferability is the fourth indicator articulated by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Kerfting (1991) explained, “Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts, populations, circumstances, or settings” (p.

2). Transferability is always the onus of the reader. Lincoln and Guba (1985); and Yin (2003) ascribed to two types of transferability: internal and external. Internal transferability refers to the establishing of patterns, explanations, and logic in the study, whereas, external transferability concentrates on the theoretical framework and the meaning derived from application of the findings. Both internal and external transferability were observed to enhance trustworthiness.

Internal validity is concern with the extent to which the research findings correspond with reality or whether the research findings are credible as they relate to the data collected. Internal validity of the study was strengthened by the use of site and participant selection criteria, contract protocols, interview schedules, and analysis of the data gathered by mean of the *a priori* themes of the study conceptual framework.

Merriam (2009) explained, “External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (p. 223). This objective will be achieved by the research design using purposeful sampling, which intentionally seeks variation or diversity in the sampling selection to allow for a greater range of application of the findings. External validity encompassing purposeful sampling and maximum variation of institution locations provides the reader with avenues to understand the research findings and transfer them to his or her particular situation if appropriate.

The study provided sufficient details and contextual information so as to make the steps or processes undertaken understandable and easy to follow either practically or in their entirety. The findings are presented so that the readers can relate them to their specific college or adapt them to a fairly similar situation or area. Merriam (2009) noted, “The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do” (p. 224).

Transferability also delivers rich thick descriptive narrative; Narratives that conveys enough description to contextualize the study in a manner that permits readers to determine the extent to which their situation matches the research context, and hence the transferability of the findings to meet their needs.

Trustworthiness of the research is always concerned with credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability of the findings, as well as the study design. Consistency in data collection and analysis and strict adherence to the study design enhances the validity of the research. A detailed audit trail was provided for the reader expounding on details of research design, protocol established, data collection methods, and data analysis processes. This transparency of the design provided a way to corroborated findings and a trustworthiness of the research. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria for trustworthiness simultaneously and independently operated in concert to influence the rigor of the research. Rigorous research yields rich and robust findings for analysis that will withstand scrutiny, and consequently provide a deliverable for further exploration.

Limitations

In research, there always is the potential for limitations. No research is perfect and without its imperfections. Typically imperfections present doubt in the findings. Consequently, it is common practice for researchers to report both the weaknesses and strengths of a study. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) stated, "Good researchers know—and they also report—the weaknesses along with the strengths of their research" (p. 276).

Each research study can present a unique set of limitations such as a poorly constructed instrument, survey, and interview questions; decreased recall of the events by participants; timing of the interviews; participants' withdrawal from the study; and limited time available to

the participants or researcher to complete the study. Creswell (2008) corroborated this viewpoint in his statement regarding research, saying that limitations “often relate to inadequate measures of variables, loss or lack of participants, small sample sizes, errors in measurements, and other factors typically related to data collection or analysis” (p. 207).

This study has acknowledged two limitations and dealt with each accordingly. The two limitations for the study were (a) diminished participant recall regarding the historical development of the student success course/course(s) at the college; and (b) researcher bias.

Diminished Recall

The participants’ ability to recall the historical development of the student success course/course(s) was vital to meet the purpose of the study. The gathering of accurate information, perceptions, and insights by the participants assisted in an understanding of how and in what ways these college student success courses/course(s) were developed. Ultimately, accurate recall aided to track the metamorphosis of the programs since they were implemented. However, diminished recall of the events can happen when a substantial time has passed between when and what processes were involved during the implementation of the student success course/course(s). Also, obtaining the information and data can be limited if people originally in charge of the program are no longer employed by the institution and the current people in charge know little about how the program came about. To minimize this limitation, a contact protocol was put in place. The contact protocol act as the initial introduction to the research, and provided the interview questions in advance of the scheduled interview so that the information might be investigated further by the participant, resulting more complete answers.

Researcher Bias

In the interpretive paradigm, the research as an instrument typically raises the point of subjectivity, a position of weakness that should be avoided. According to Maxwell (2005), “what you bring to the research from your own background and identity has been treated as bias, something whose influence needs to be eliminated from the design, rather than a valuable component of it” (p. 37). Because the researcher was very knowledgeable concerning student success courses and had been the administrator of many, the researcher needed to be careful not to insert words, thoughts, or perspectives. This behavior could happen during data collection or the analysis process. To limit researcher bias and to increase the research integrity, reflexivity, a critical self-reflection was employed throughout the research process. This process allowed the researcher to separate her personal perspective from the thoughts, ideas, and insights expounded by the study participants. A transparent audit trail was used to provide a trail to authenticate the findings of the study.

Researcher as the Tool/Instrument

A major characteristic of qualitative research is the researcher as the primary instrument for the collection of data, analyzing the data, and presenting the findings (Merriam 2009). Denzin and Lincoln (2008) proclaimed, “All research is interpretive; it is guided by the researcher’s set of belief and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied” (p. 31). The final findings of qualitative research are always presented from the researcher’s construct, which is from a position of interacting with the researcher’s experiences and prior knowledge. Creswell (2007) agreed and said, “The final written report or presentation includes the voices of the participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex

description and interpretation of the problem” (p. 27). Therefore, the reader should be aware of the researcher’s background, experiences, and expertise in the field.

In 1974, immediately after graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree in biology with a minor in chemistry from George Williams College (now in Aurora University), the researcher began working for Standard Oil Company (Amoco). Within 12 years at Amoco, she had advanced in her career to a senior research assistant, with a variety of responsibilities in the chemical inspection laboratory. Inspection responsibilities ranged from performing basic chemical testing on petroleum products to analyzing petroleum products utilizing sophisticated instruments such as gas and liquid chromatography, nuclear magnetic resonance, and others. Her responsibility also included generating calculations and interpretations for written reports to be used for both internal and external customers.

However, because of needing more time with her growing family, she decided to pursue a teaching career. After teaching in the high school for several years, it was apparent her calling was to help students to succeed. Her community college career started at Kankakee Community College (KCC) in 1985, where she was employed as an adjunct career services instructor, teaching job readiness skills for adult students. During her employment with KCC, she also held several other positions and responsibilities. In 1986, she was given the added responsibility of adult basic education skills instructor, providing instruction to adults whose reading and math levels were below fifth grade. While still at KCC, in 1987 she became coordinator for a new initiative, the Teen Parent Program (TPC). This position provided the opportunity for development of numerous leadership skills. As TPC coordinator, her responsibilities included public relationship and marketing, as well as partnership building with all stakeholders (e.g., educational, political, social services, community-based, and faith-based organizations). In

addition, she was responsible for supervising, evaluating, and training of group facilitators and recruiters, fiscal management of the program, fundraising, and generation of all state reports. After 4 years, the researcher left KCC and took a position with Joliet Junior College (JJC).

The researcher's career at JJC started in 1990, as an adjunct instructor of parenting education. Six months later, she was hired as the public aid special project and assessment coordinator, a full-time administrative position. As coordinator, the researcher's responsibilities consisted of recruitment and retention of students, workshop planner, conduct assessments, interpretations of the assessments, as well as, the managing of a diverse population of individuals. During this time, she enrolled at Illinois State University and, in 1996, earned a Master of Science degree in education.

Since becoming a full-time employee with JCC, she has coordinated a myriad of programs. In 2000, she was promoted to coordinator of the Secretary of State (SOS) Family Literacy Project, and coordination of several family literacy programs within Will and Grundy counties where she supervised, trained, and managed SOS personal. She also was involved in the coordination and management of the Secretary of State's volunteer literacy program from 2002–2004. Again she was responsible for recruiting (throughout the JJC five-county district), training, mentoring, matching, and supervising volunteer tutors. Because of her leadership skills, she has coordinating several different programs designed to assist women in becoming self-sufficient (e.g., displaced homemakers program, Wonder Woman, and Dress for Success), just to name a few.

In 2005, she advanced at JJC to become the coordinator for both the Adult Basic Skills and the Special Needs Assessment Center, where she was responsible for assisting learners to succeed and gain their GED. She also had supervisory responsibilities for instruction of special

learning needs. For the past 5 years, she has held the position of instruction coordinator of the English as a second language (ESL) program, which includes: ESL classes, citizenship classes, English literacy civics classes, and ESL computer class for JJC, and Department of Adult Education and Literacy. As coordinator of the Adult Basic Skills and the Special Needs Assessment Center, she manages 32 classes at 12 different locations spread throughout parts of five counties as well as the supervision of 27.

Over her career, the researcher has had an opportunity to serve in an array of leadership capacities both at KCC and JJC. Each leadership situation provided an opportunity to promote programs designed to assist with student success. The researcher's passion for over 20 years has been supporting individuals to successfully achieve their educational goals at a community college.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided the design for the research study. The research, a qualitative inquiry situated in an interpretative paradigm, was chosen for this case study methodology. Because all sampling in qualitative research is purposeful, this chapter delineated the criteria for the purposeful selection of participants, as well as the maximum variation of site selections. For maximum variation, site selection was based on the ICCB peer group institution criteria, full-time enrollment size, location, and urbanization, and financial data.

The chapter presented data collection methods that were used, which included surveys, interviews involving personnel from six Illinois single-campus community colleges, documents, and field notes. All data and information collected went through a comprehensive rigorous analysis searching for patterns, categories, and themes, while coding utilizing Creswell's (2008) data analysis spiral. Creswell's data analysis spiral established a logical system for data analysis:

managing of data, reading and memoing; describing; clarifying and interpreting; and representing and visualizing. Care was taken to ensure trustworthiness and validity throughout each stage of the research process with the adoption of Lincoln and Guba's (2005) four stages of trustworthiness: credibility; dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

The chapter also acknowledged two limitations: (a) participants' diminished recall regarding the historical development of the student success course/course(s) and (b) researcher bias. Provisions for dealing with these limitations were also addressed. Chapter 3 concluded with a discussion of the researcher's background, creating the context for the researcher as an instrument. The expertise and experience of the researcher was provided, allowing readers greater transparency into the background of the researcher.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Unlike quantitative research, in which data are collected by means of numbers, qualitative research data are collected through words. These words are rich, thick, and descriptive, consequently painting pictures from the thoughts, ideas, insights, and perspectives of research participants. Maxwell (2005) concluded that “the strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach; its focuses on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers” (p. 22). In addition, qualitative research provides the opportunity to study how participants make sense of a phenomenon, thus clarifying any misconceptions and adding a deeper understanding to the research findings. Research begins with actual collection of data and the discovery of foundational themes that can be transported to circumstances. Lincoln and Guba (1985) characterized this process as naturalistic generalization.

This chapter introduces and highlights the findings of the four-phase data collection process undertaken during the research progression. The four phases of data collection, as demonstrated in Figure 18, are (a) site and participant protocol and web-based surveying, which establishes confirmability and credibility; (b) site demographics as a result of documents reviewed and participants’ demographics resulting from the web-based survey, which provides a historical context; (c) participants’ face-to-face interviews, which contribute to contextualizing the research and also aid in comprehension and dependability; and (d) reflective field notes, which provide written reflective support and aid in the validation of the research. The process of data collecting exemplifies that of a multiple-method qualitative case study. This chapter represents an analysis of the findings. Figure 4 represents the four methods of data collection for this research.

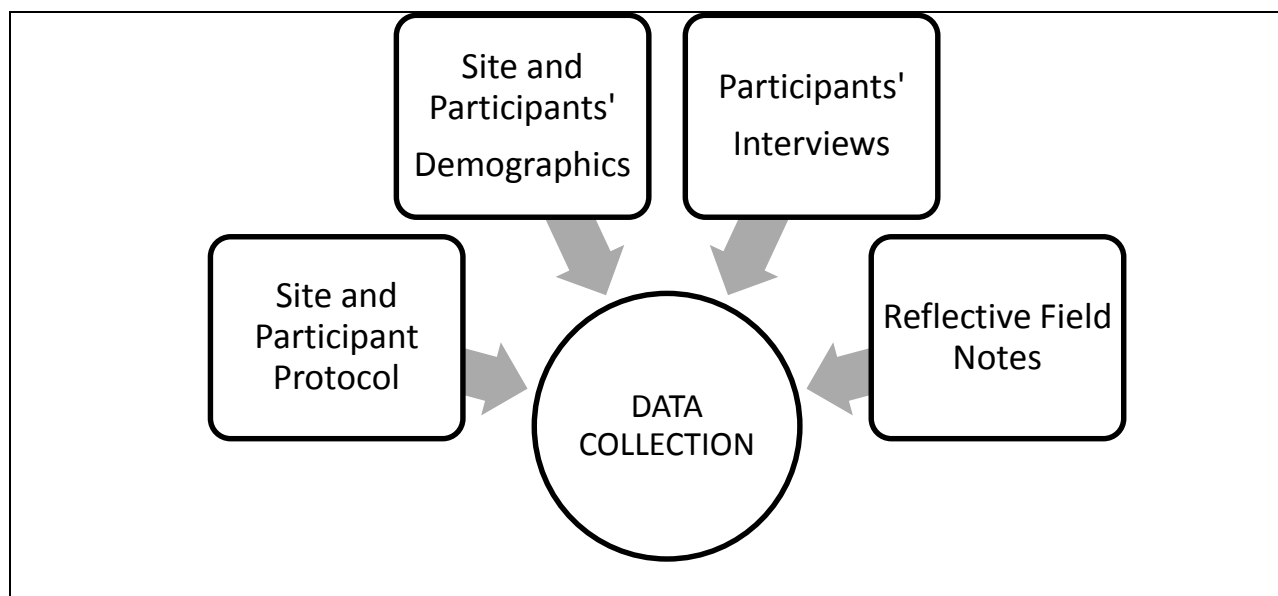


Figure 4. Four phases of data collection.

Each of the four phases shown in Figure 4 was designed to ensure trustworthiness and validity. The four phases were important to allow for triangulation of the findings. Triangulation affirms and corroborates themes and categories identified within each phase.

A plethora of information exists in the form of qualitative and quantitative studies related to student success course(s). However, there is a scarcity of data reflecting which components are more advantageous for students and institutions as a whole. This research was undertaken to identify those components of success courses that are more beneficial.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-site case study was to identify the components of first-year first-semester college success course(s) specifically designed to foster student success. Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement, the CCCSE's seven principles for student success, and Stufflebeam's theory/model of program evaluation served as the framework for the research.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What catalysts are instrumental to implementation of the college success course instituted by the college?
2. How are the overall design and the components of the college success course selected?
3. How and in what way do the college success courses maintain quality and viability?
4. How is the impact of the college success course evaluated and demonstrated?

Site and Participant Protocol

The purpose of the online survey was twofold: first, to determine germane personal demographic and programmatic information concerning the institutions and possible participants, and second, to identify six institutions and individuals to take part in the second phase of the research.

The multiple-method design of data collection was followed to guarantee trustworthiness and validity of the research findings. The findings were then triangulated, allowing for insights and relevant perspectives from distinctive lenses to be revealed. To further substantiate contextualization and comprehension of data, participants' responses were summarized whenever possible.

Data collection began with a phone call to administrators of each of the 37 single-campus community colleges. Calls were made to vice presidents, deans, directors, or program coordinators. Initial phone contacts were made between October 31, 2012, and November 9, 2012. Phone contacts were important because they provided the opportunity to (a) establish the research by means of introducing the research to potential clients; (b) ascertain who in the college was most knowledgeable concerning success courses; (c) introduce the web-based survey; and (d) obtain direct contact information, e-mail address, and phone number for sending

the link to the online survey and for following up in the future. Once the necessary information was established, individuals were asked to complete the initial online (web-based) survey.

Site Protocol

The online survey (see Appendix C), composed of 28 questions, was distributed on November 21, 2012. To increase the number of respondents, a reminder e-mail was sent to those nonresponsive individual institutions on December 10, 2012. Of the 37 Illinois community colleges with single-managed operating systems, the survey was viewed by an individual from each of 33 institutions. Of the 33 institutions from which an individual viewed the survey, an individual from each of 12 institutions completed the online survey, with nine partial completions, yielding a total of 21 respondents and a completion rate of 57%. See Figure 5 for a visual representation of the distribution of complete and incomplete responses.

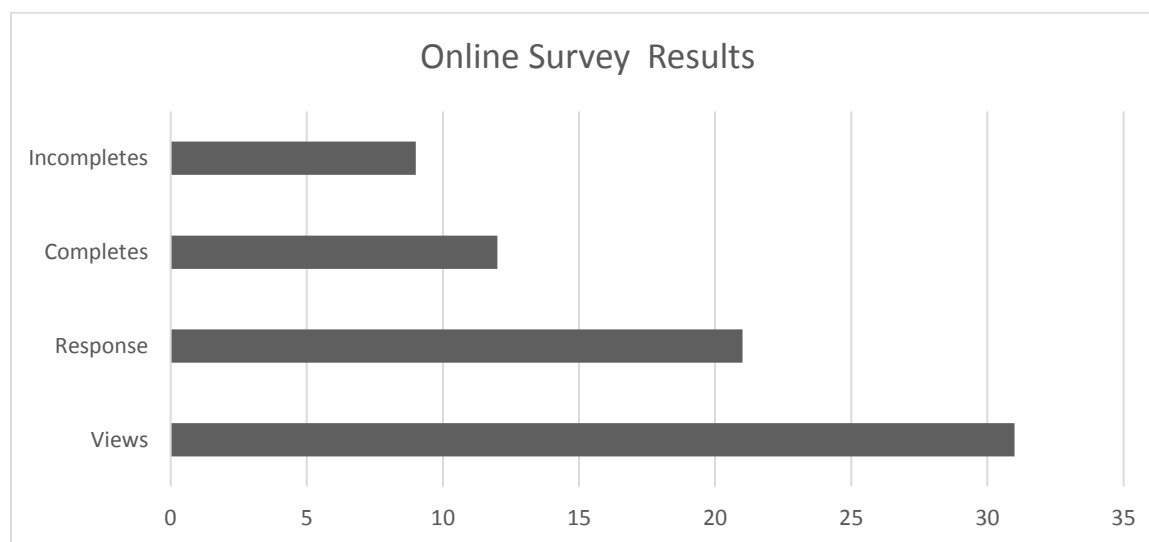


Figure 5. Online survey results.

For maximum variation, six institutions, one from each of the ICCB peer institution groups, were chosen to participate in the study. Table 15 provides the criteria for each designated peer group.

Table 15. Peer Group Designation by ICCB

Peer group	Peer institution group criteria
Group 1	Enrollment less than 3,000, downstate, located in or near communities of less than 50,000 people
Group 2	Enrollment approximately 3,000–4,000, downstate, located in or near communities of less than 50,000 people
Group 3	Enrollment greater than 4,000, downstate, located in or near communities of less than 50,000 people
Group 4	Located downstate and in urbanized areas
Group 5	Enrollment less than 10,000, located in Chicago metropolitan area
Group 6	City Colleges of Chicago
Group 7	Enrollment greater than 10,000, located in Chicago metropolitan area

Note. Adapted from *Illinois Community College Board Peer Groups*, by Illinois Community College Board, 2010

There were no institutions selected from Peer Group 6 because community colleges in this peer group are not campuses with a single management system. For the remaining six institutions, a rigorous protocol was followed and special care was taken to ensure trustworthiness and validity.

Ten institutions accepted the invitation to become part of the research study. Selection of the final subject institutions was established by order of responses; positive affirmation to the invitation to participate in a face-to-face interview, and the consideration of maximum variation. The criteria for maximum variation included (a) geographic location, (b) full-time enrollment, and (c) AACC membership, all indicators for ICCB designated peer groups. From each chosen peer institution group, a consenting administrator accepted the request to participate in this study.

Participant Protocol

The research was specifically crafted to be reviewed by vice presidents, deans, directors, or the individuals in the institutions who were most knowledgeable about and possessed firsthand experience concerning student success courses. As a result of the survey, an administrator from one institution in each of the ICCB peer groups was contacted and asked to

participate in the study. The research relied on information and data collected from the six participants.

A rigorous protocol was followed and special care was taken to ensure trustworthiness and validity. Table 16 delineates the operational steps adhered to in the participant contact protocol.

Table 16. Contact Protocol

Timeline	Task
October 2012	Secured a list of all (37) VPs of student affairs / development
November 2012	Called offices of all VPs to obtain the names and numbers of qualified would-be participants. Called participants to introduce the web survey. Sent out web survey to qualified participants.
December 2012	Web survey reminder sent. Secured (by phone) one face-to-face interview
January 2013	Confirmed interview via e-mail. Sent copy of interview questions via e-mail. Obtained phone confirmation of face-to-face interview. Conducted interview. Completed field notes. Collected documents.
February 2013	Secured second face-to-face interview (by phone). Sent copy of interview questions via e-mail. Obtained phone confirmation of face-to-face interview. Conducted interview. Completed field notes. Collected documents.
March 2013	Secured third and fourth face-to-face interviews. Sent copy of interview questions via e-mail. Obtained phone confirmation of face-to-face interviews. Conducted interviews. Completed field notes. Collected documents. Performed member checking of interviews and transcripts.
April 2013	Secured fifth and sixth face-to-face interviews. Sent copy of interview questions via e-mail. Obtained phone confirmation of face-to-face interviews. Conducted interviews. Completed field notes. Collected documents.

Timeline	Task
	Performed member checking of interviews and transcripts.

Site and Participant Demographics

As previously explained, colleges were selected based on order of response and for maximum variation. All names used for the institutions discussed in this study are pseudonyms. The following demographics for each institution are the results of documents reviewed.

Site Demographics

McKinley Morganfield Community College (MMCC). McKinley Morganfield Community College (MMCC) is a small-city suburban college with an enrollment between approximately 8,400 and 8,500. The breakdown of enrollment translates to approximately 64% part-time students and 36% full-time students as of 2010–2012 fall enrollments. Enrollment at MMCC is predominantly White, followed by with African American and Hispanic. Approximately 52% of the student body receives some type of financial aid. In 2011, MMCC had a graduation rate of 25% for men and 14% for women within a 3-year time period to program completion. Figures 6 and 7 provide an illustration of the enrollments and the graduating numbers, respectively.

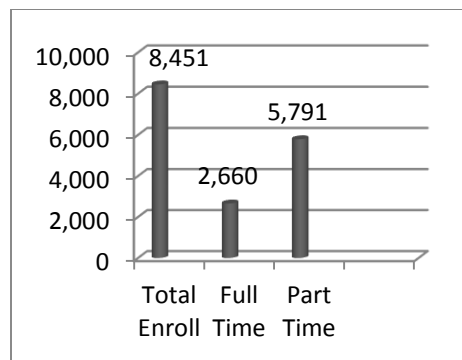


Figure 6. Total enrollments at MMCC.

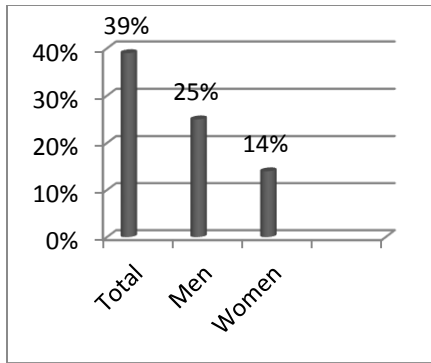


Figure 7. Graduating within 3 years from MMCC

W. Carney Community College (WCCC). W. Carney Community College (WCCC) is a large-city suburban institution with a single-campus operating system that serves 17,390–18,200 students. Of the total enrollment, nearly 55% are part-time students, leaving the remaining 44–45% as full-time students in 2010 and 2012. By gender, enrollment at WWCC consists of approximately 46% men and 54% women. WCCC has a total minority population of 24%, with African American students representing 9% of the minority population and Hispanic students representing 13% of the student population. The 2011 rates for graduation within 3 years were 15% for men and 17% for women. The total enrollments and students graduating from WCCC within a 3-year period of time are illustrated in figures 8 and 9, respectively.

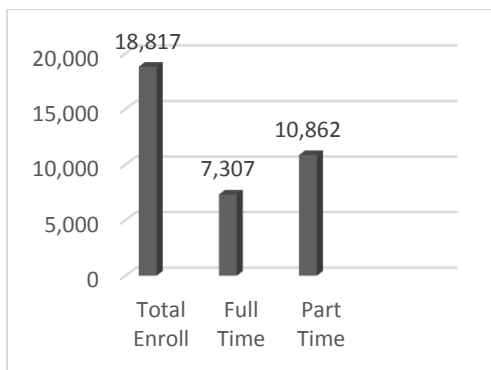


Figure 8. Total enrollments at WCCC.

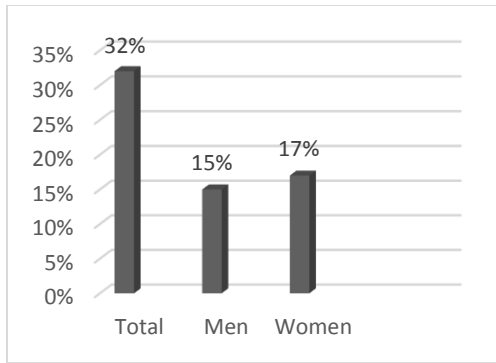


Figure 9. Graduating within 3 years from WCCC.

Terry Peoples Community College (TPCC). Terry Peoples Community College (TPCC) is considered a public rural large campus serving a mid-sized suburban population. TPCC had an enrollment of 5,459–5,620 between 2010 and 2012. The largest percentage of those enrolled are considered part-time students (53%, as compared to full-time student enrollment of approximately 47%). At TPCC, the ethnic and racial composition of the population is approximately 4% Hispanic, 10% African American, and 78% White. Graduation or program completion within 3 years is represented by rates of 24% for men and 37% for women. Figures 10 and 11 depict the total number enrolled, as well as the number of students graduating within a 3-year span, respectively.

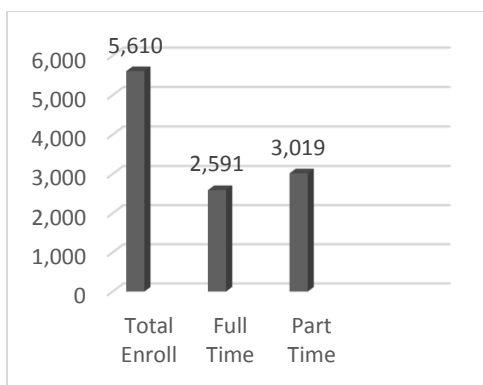


Figure 10. Total enrollments at TPCC

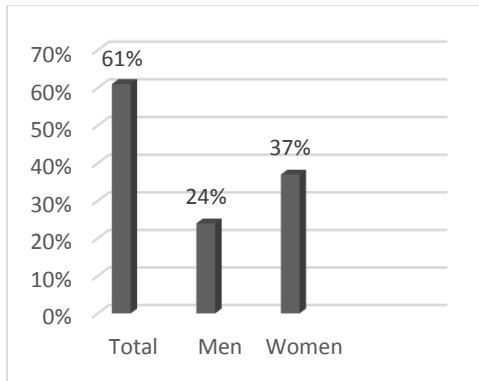


Figure 11. Graduating within 3 years from TPCC.

Theresa Williams Community College (TWCC). Theresa Williams Community College (TWCC) is a public suburban community college serving a mid-sized city. TWCC has had an enrollment of between 12,220 and 12,825 over the past few years. TWCC also has more students enrolled part-time: 65%, as compared to a full-time enrollment of approximately 35%. The student population of TWCC is ethnically and racially diverse: approximately 32% of students self-identify as Hispanic, 6.4% as Asian/Pacific, 6% as African American, and 52% as White. In 2011, TWCC had a 3-year program completion rate of 30% among women and 25% among men. Figures 12 and 13 illustrate the total enrollment population and graduation rates within a 3-year period, respectively.

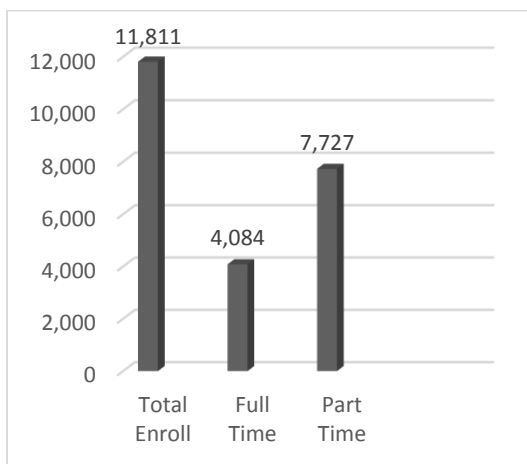


Figure 12. Total enrollments at TWCC.

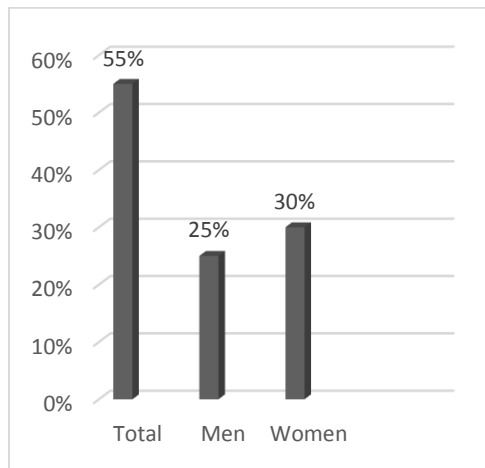


Figure 13. Graduating within 3 years from TWCC.

Otis Jerome Community College (OJCC). Otis Jerome Community College (OJCC) has a student body enrollment of approximately 5,380 in 2010. By 2012, the fall enrollment was approximately 4,943 students. By gender, this rural community college has a female enrollment of approximately 55%, with a male enrollment at approximately 46%. The part-time student population is approaching 64%, while the full-time population is approximately 38%. Approximately 92% of the OJCC student population is White, 6% is African American, and approximately 2% is Hispanic. By gender, the rates at which students completing a program within a 3-year period was approximately 50% for men and approximately 57% for women. Figures 14 and 15 illustrated the total enrollment and total number of students graduating within a 3-year period at OJCC, respectively.

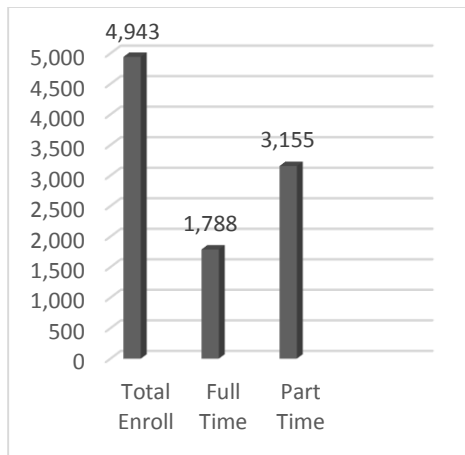


Figure 14. Total enrollments at OJCC.

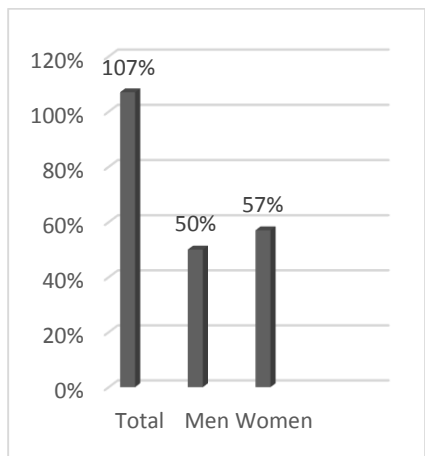


Figure 15. Graduating within 3 years from OJCC.

Jackson McGee Community College (MJCC). Jackson McGee Community College is a public community college on the fringes between a rural and a medium-sized setting. The enrollment population in 2010 was approximately 1,900 and was approximately 1,970 in 2012. MJCC has an approximately equal percentage enrollment of full-time versus part-time students. Of the total student population, 57% are women and approximately 43% are men. In terms of ethnicity or race, 4% of the student body is African American, approximately 1% is Hispanic, and approximately 94% is White. The program completion rate within a 3-year period stands at approximately 32 % for men and approximately 28% for women. The total numbers of

enrollments and finishers within a 3-year period are demonstrated in figures 16 and 17, respectively.

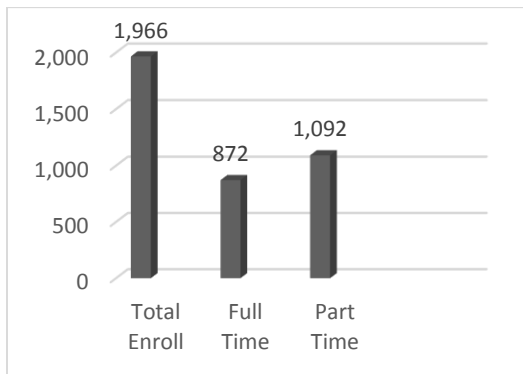


Figure 16. Total enrollments at MJCC.

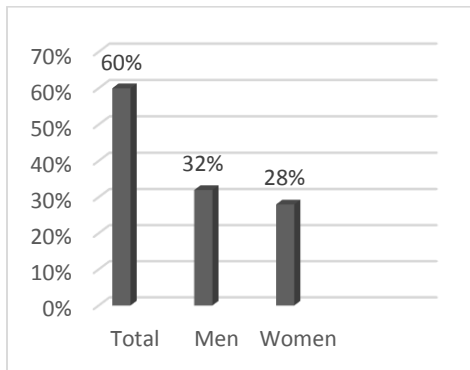


Figure 17. Graduating within 3 years from MJCC.

For additional demographic information of all participating community colleges, see Table 17.

Table 17. Institution Demographics

Demographic	MMCC	WCCC	TPCC	OJCC	MJCC	TWCC
Enrollment						
FT enrolled	2,660	7,307	2,591	1,788	872	4,084
PT enrolled	5,791	10,862	3,019	3,155	1,094	7,727
Total enrolled	8,451	18,169	5,610	4,943	1,966	11,811
Ethnicity						
African American	651	2,054	570	303	107	656
Hispanic	133	3,008	230	76	31	3,874
Asian	55	407	118	39	17	717
Native American	16	45	8	19	0	9
White	7,147	10,589	4,358	4,503	1,797	6,012
First-time degree/certificate seekers						
FT	621	960	662	1,053	342	882
PT	194	370	242	379	93	396
Non-degree/certificate seekers						
FT	113	2,130	20	91	11	298
PT	3,227	5,254	3756	2,290	445	2,745
Graduating within 3 years (%)						
Men	25	15	24	50	32	25
Women	14	17	37	57	28	30
African American	17%	6%	12%	37%	19%	14%
Hispanic	17%	14%	26%	36%	60%	28%
Asian		14%		100%	33%	30%
Native American		33%	50%			
White	20%	17%	33%	55%	30%	28%
Certificate/associate's degree						
Men	758	1,121	214	714	95	1,237
Women	1,004	1,427	408	714	165	1,304
African American	110	131	37	65	4	99
Hispanic	13	331	29	24	4	541
Asian	13	57	10	5	1	145
Native American	3	5	4	0	0	5
White	1,588	1,826	599	1,204	251	1,673
Staff numbers, standard support staff						
FT	63	175	94	53	36	102
PT	21	0	12	50	8	45

Note. Adapted from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS Data Center, and “American Association of Community Colleges Institution Profiles,” by American Association of Community Colleges.

Participant Demographics

Web survey. Similar to the process of selecting institutions, individual participants representing each institution were selected based on order of response to the web survey, thereby ensuring maximum variation. The first 11 survey questions garnered participants’ demographic information. The following information is representative of the demographic findings collected from the web-based survey. All participants responding to the survey worked in an administrative capacity, either as vice presidents, deans, director, or coordinators. Questions 1, 2, and 3 collected participants’ consent, contact information, and gender; respectively.

Question 1: Please confirm your consent to participate. Of the respondents, 95%, or 30 out of 32 of Illinois community college respondents, consented to complete the survey. One college respondent declined to provide consent to participate; therefore, the individual was not allowed to complete the survey.

Question 2: Contact information. Individuals completing the survey were required to provide the name of the institution, his or her name, and date of viewing the survey. A total of 92% of the respondents provided the necessary information.

Question 3: Gender. Of those completing the survey, 50% self-reported as men, and 50% self-reported as women.

Questions 4 through 6 concentrated on age group, ethnicity, and education levels.

Question 4: Age group. The average age of the majority of the individuals completing the survey was between 55 and 59 years. Those in the age group of 40-45 years represented the second largest group. Answers to this survey question revealed there were no individuals

between the ages of 45 and 49 completing the survey. Figure 18 illustrates a breakdown of the age groups of all respondents.

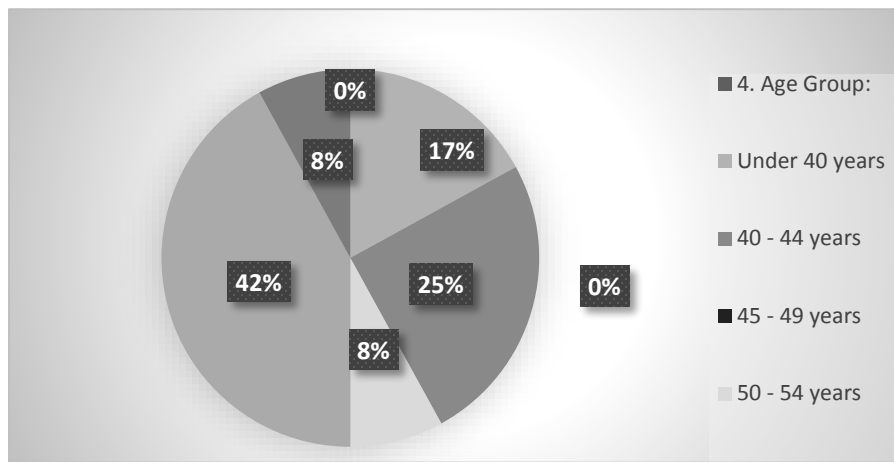


Figure 18. Percentage of participants by age.

Question 5: Ethnicity. The ethnicity of respondents was largely White non-Hispanic (75%). Seventeen percent of those completing the survey were African American. Eight percent of survey completers were Hispanic. Figure 19 depicts the ethnicities of all those completing the survey.

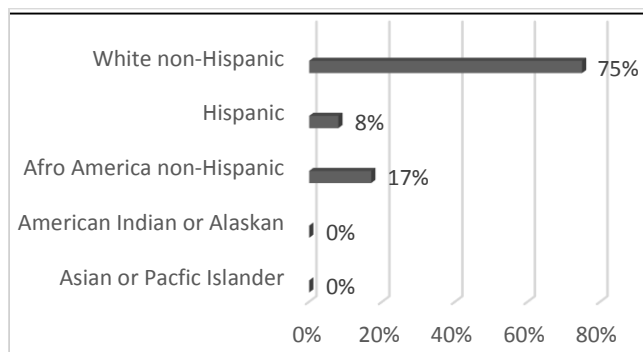


Figure 19. Percentage of participants by ethnicity.

Question 6: Education level. Of those completing this question, approximately 54% held a doctoral degree. On average, 92% held some type of advanced degree. Participants'

demographics are highlighted in figures 18 through 20 by age, ethnicity, and educational levels, respectively.

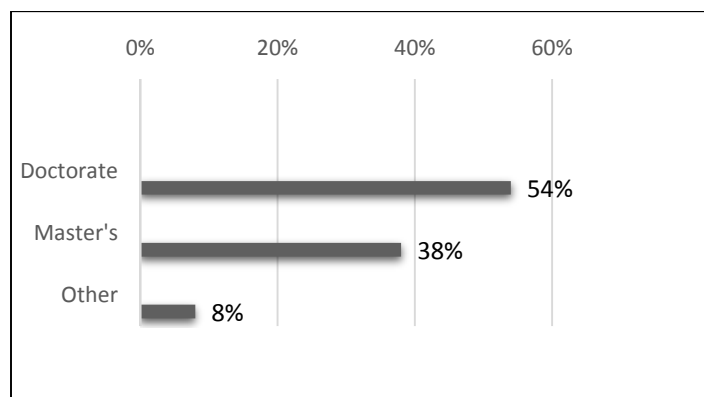


Figure 20. Percentage of participants by education level.

Question 7: What is your current position? Briefly describe your work responsibilities. **Question 8: What were your previous positions? Briefly describe your work responsibilities.** Questions 7 and 8 asked about previous and current positions. The replies varied and ranged from academic support staff to vice presidents. Table 18 illustrates previous positions and current positions held by administrators who completed the online survey. None of the respondents described what their responsibilities were in these particular roles.

Table 18. Previous and Current Job Titles

Previous title	Current titles
Vice president for student services	Vice president for student services
Vice president of instruction services	Dean of transfer education
Vice president administration	Dean of student services
Associate vice president for students	Director of admissions and retention
Dean of college transition services	Dean of instruction
Dean of student services	Director of admission & recruitment
Assistant dean of new students	Director of academic support
Director of student success	Associate director of students
Director student retention	Assistant dean of students
Coordinator for student retention	Adjunct development instructor

Question 9: How long have you been responsible for the college success course(s)?

The majority of those responding, 33%, had been responsible for success course(s) years. The survey also revealed 17% had held this responsibility for 1 year or less. Figure 21 shows the number of years individuals reported as being responsible for success course(s).

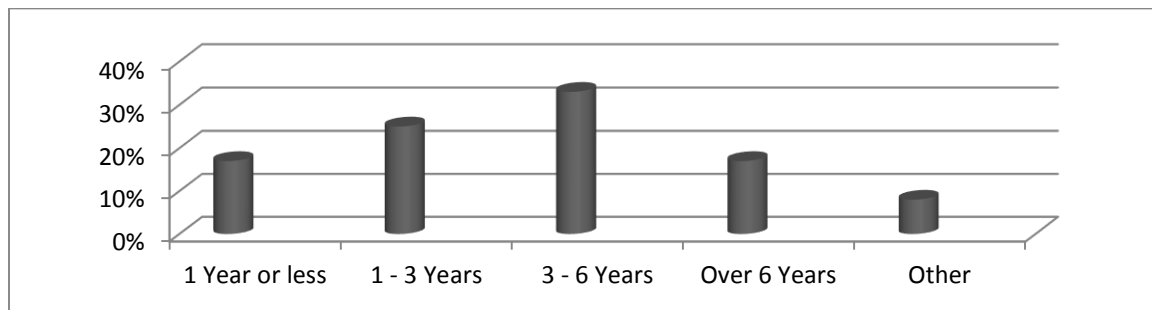


Figure 21. Length of time responsible for success course(s).

Question 10: How many hours a week do you dedicate to student success course(s)?

According to the responses, the average amount of time dedicated to success course(s) was 10 hours or less per week (67%). Eight percent stated they worked full-time, 31–40 hours per week, with success course(s). Figure 22 highlights the wide range of hours dedicated to supporting success course(s).

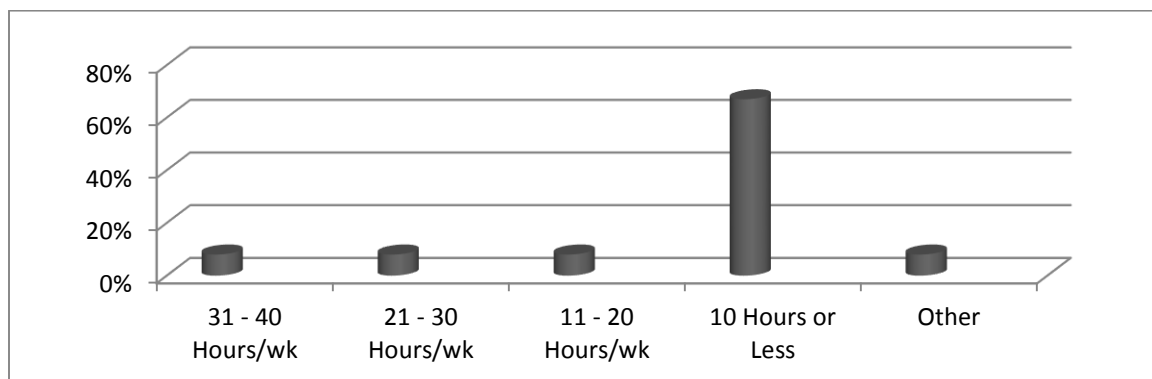


Figure 22. Weekly hours dedicated to success course(s).

The final demographic question pertained to staff training and whether there were any specific training requirements for working with success course(s).

Question 11: What special training or professional development activities have the staff attended or are required to attend in order to work with student success course(s)?

Listed below are the various trainings participating individuals reported:

- Biannual faculty and staff training
- NACADA, League of Innovation
- Pearson webinar
- Training provided through Title IV grant
- Current staff and/or faculty trainings

Programmatic Questions

The survey advanced from questions 1 through 11 regarding the respondents' demographics to numbers 12 through 27 regarding programmatic questions. This set of questions gathered information concerning how success course(s) are set up, operated, and evaluated.

Question 12: What is/are the titles of your institution's student success course(s)?

Question 12 was designed to identify the range of names assigned to success courses. The top eight titles are displayed in Table 19.

Table 19. Emphasis of Success Course(s)

Success course(s) titles	Success course(s) emphasis
First-Year Experience	Core focus on transitioning students
Student Development 100	College LMS technology training
Still Developing	Still developing
Instruction 101 Success College	Aimed at student success
Being Developed	Each course has its own objective
Orientation 101	Introduction to college
College Academic Success	Open environment where student get support
College Success, GSD 101	Provides college information

Question 13: Briefly explain the activities /purpose of your student success course(s).

While Question 12 was posed to ascertain titles of success course(s), Question 13 was designed to gather information explaining the focus or objective assigned to success course(s). In addition to titles assigned to success course(s), Table 19 also displays the emphasis ascribed to success course(s) as reported by each institution.

Question 14: Is/are the first-year student success course(s) mandatory? Of the respondents, 42% stated success course(s) were not mandatory, while 33% stated the course(s) were mandatory. Of the respondents, 42% briefly explained specific situations such as, “success course will be mandatory in the fall as a new requirement” and “success course(s), like other services, are not mandatory but left up to the student to make the choice.”

Question 15: If the student stops out or drops out, must they retake the success course(s) if they re-enroll? Of those surveyed, 67% indicated their institution did not require students to retake success course(s) if the student stopped out or dropped out and then re-enrolled. Thirty-three percent did require students to retake student success course(s) upon re-enrolling.

Question 16: Explain circumstances when the student must retake the success course. Question 16 was a follow-up to Question 15. The following list is a variety of circumstances that might necessitate retaking a student success course:

- If a student does not complete the first time enrolled
- If a student fails the first time enrolled
- If a student is on academic probation
- If a student is required to take a developmental course(s)

- If a student plans to graduate from the institution, at some point, he or she must take the success course

Question 17: Who are the students for which the success course(s) were designed?

This multiple-choice question allowed respondents to mark all the answers that applied to their institution. Forty-two percent of the respondents affirmed success course(s) were more likely to be designed for all first-time students as well as for those students with low placement test scores. According to the responses, success course(s) were less likely to be designed for first-time part-time students, ethnic minorities, and students without a high school diploma (see

Figure 23).

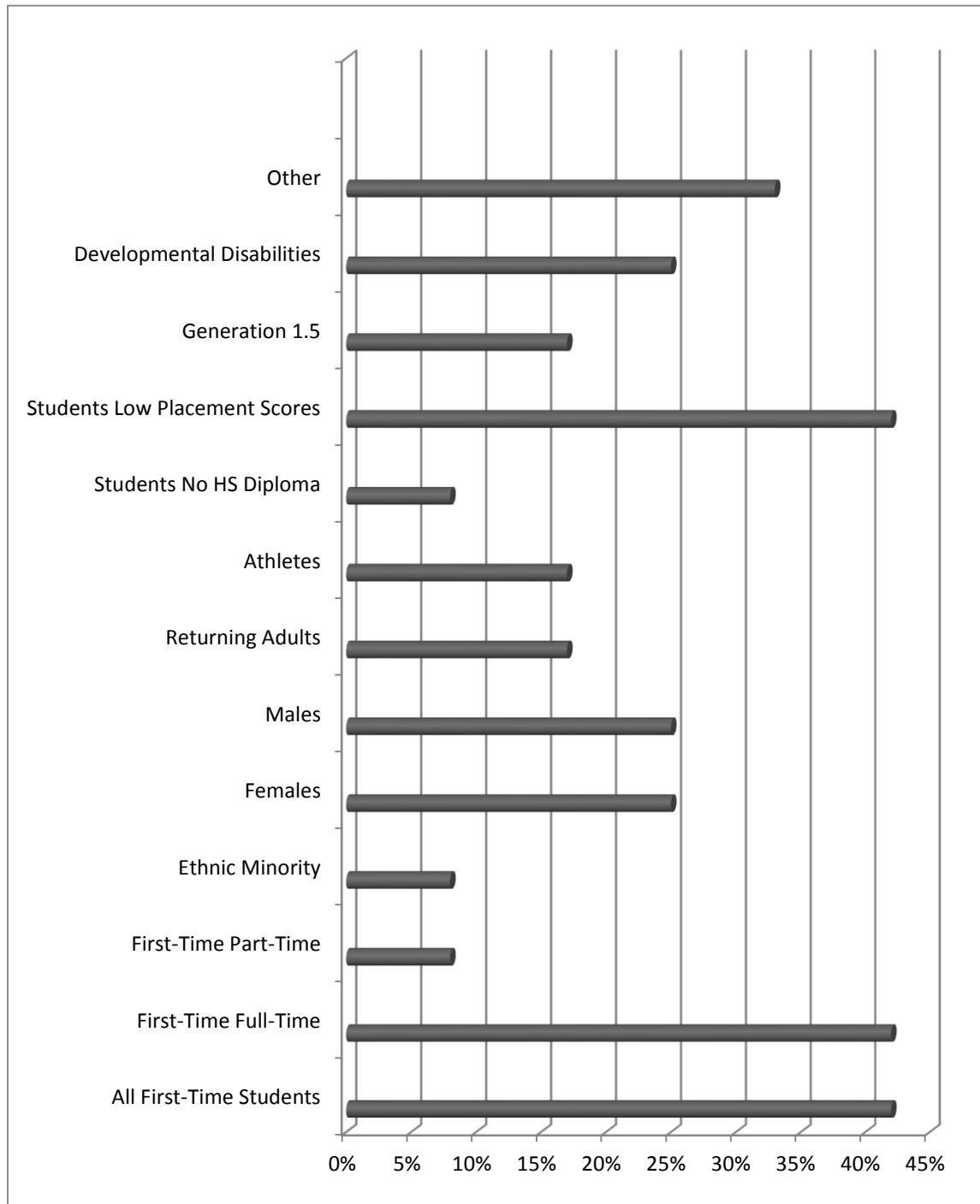


Figure 23. Students' success course(s) enrollees

Question 18: When is/are the student success course(s) offered at your college?

Success course(s) have many different entry points, which are dictated by individual institutions.

Entering a success course could vary from before the start of fall semester through anytime during the first or second month of spring semester. For this particular question, institutions had an opportunity to provide more than one answer. Figure 24 summarizes the various times at which students are offered entry into success course(s).

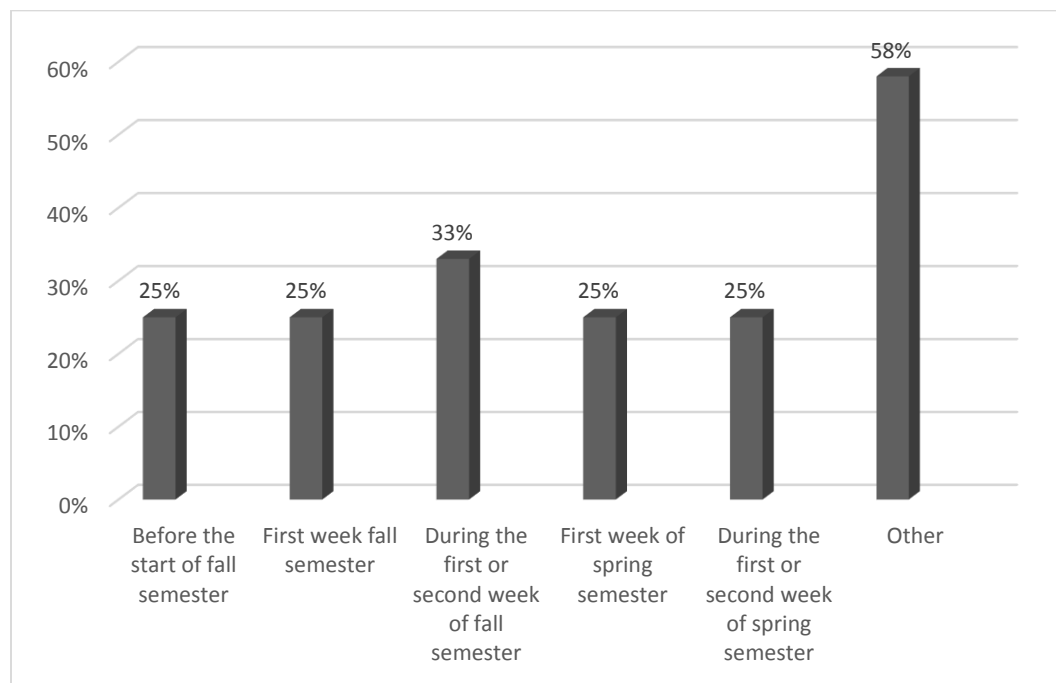


Figure 24. Scheduling of success courses.

The majority (58%) of those surveyed reported their institution offers success course(s) at times other than choices provided. Other specific times success courses when were offered were (a) as a summer bridge program; (b) as online option; (c) as a fall, spring, or summer semester entry; (d) as entry every 16 weeks, 12 weeks, or 8 weeks; and (e) anytime throughout the fall semester. However, a high percentage, 33%, did offer entry into success course(s) sometime during the first or second month of fall semester.

Question 19: What is the duration of the success course(s)? When asked about the duration of the success course(s) at their institution, almost 100% of the replies revealed that some manner of contact hours were required for the success courses. Contact hours for success

course(s) ranged from 2 through 45 hours. Seventy-three percent required hours outside of class to meet the requirements. Students were able to earn from 1 to 3 credit hours per success course. Nine percent of those surveyed had no requirements because the program was still in its infancy.

The focal points of questions 20 through 24 addressed testing and how testing correlated with success course(s). The respondents reacted to (a) whether there were specific tests for success course(s), (b) whether tests were mandated, and (c) whether there were specific scores students must obtain to enroll in a success course.

Question 20: Which placement test is the college using for entering the students in success course(s)? The majority of the institutional findings revealed COMPASS testing was required the majority of the time before entering a success course. Other institutions required either COMPASS or ASSET testing, while still others required either COMPASS or ACCUPLACER testing. There were also those institutions that had no required entry test.

Question 21: Are specific scores used to designate which students must take the college success course(s)? Question 22: Briefly explain Question 21.

Questions 21 and 22 were related. Question 22 was the follow-up for Question 21. Eighty-three percent of participants from community colleges responded that they had no specific scores to determine which students must take a success course. However, 17% did have minimum test scores required for students to enroll in a success course. These scores were not revealed.

When asked to briefly explain their response to Question 21, it was discovered that students placed in success course(s) were (a) students who had been placed in developmental education reading; (b) students who scored in one or more developmental courses; and (c)

students who were enrolled in specific courses with a success course attached. All institutions required placement scores for enrollment into success courses.

Question 23: Are students generally retested after completing success courses?

Question 24: Briefly explain Question 23. It was also discovered from the online survey that retesting after completion of a success course was not required 100% of the time. However, when asked to explain, retaking the placement test was optional for students and left for students to make the decision of retesting.

Question 25: Which of the following modalities are used in your college's success course(s)? Mark all that apply. The majority of success course(s) delivery modalities were the traditional method: face to face. However, 75% of those responding also had an online interactive mode. The least likely modality at the time the survey was administered was social networking technologies (e.g., Face book or Twitter). Figure 25 shows some of the more common modalities used by institutions for administering success courses.

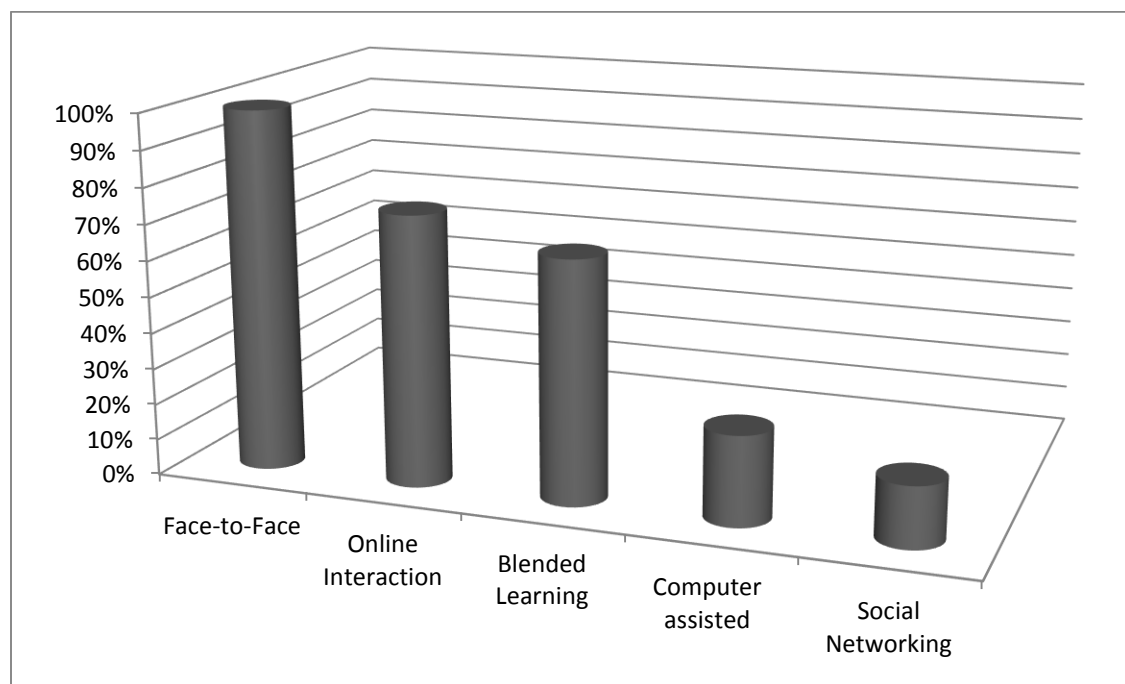


Figure 25. Success course(s) modalities.

Question 26: Please indicate all the subjects covered in your success course(s). When asked Question 26, the subjects/topics that appeared most frequently were; 92% of the time, were (a) study skills, (b) time management, (c) introduction to college success, and (d) understanding personal learning styles. The least likely topic to occur was math review. Figure 26 is a graphic representation of the feedback to Question 26.

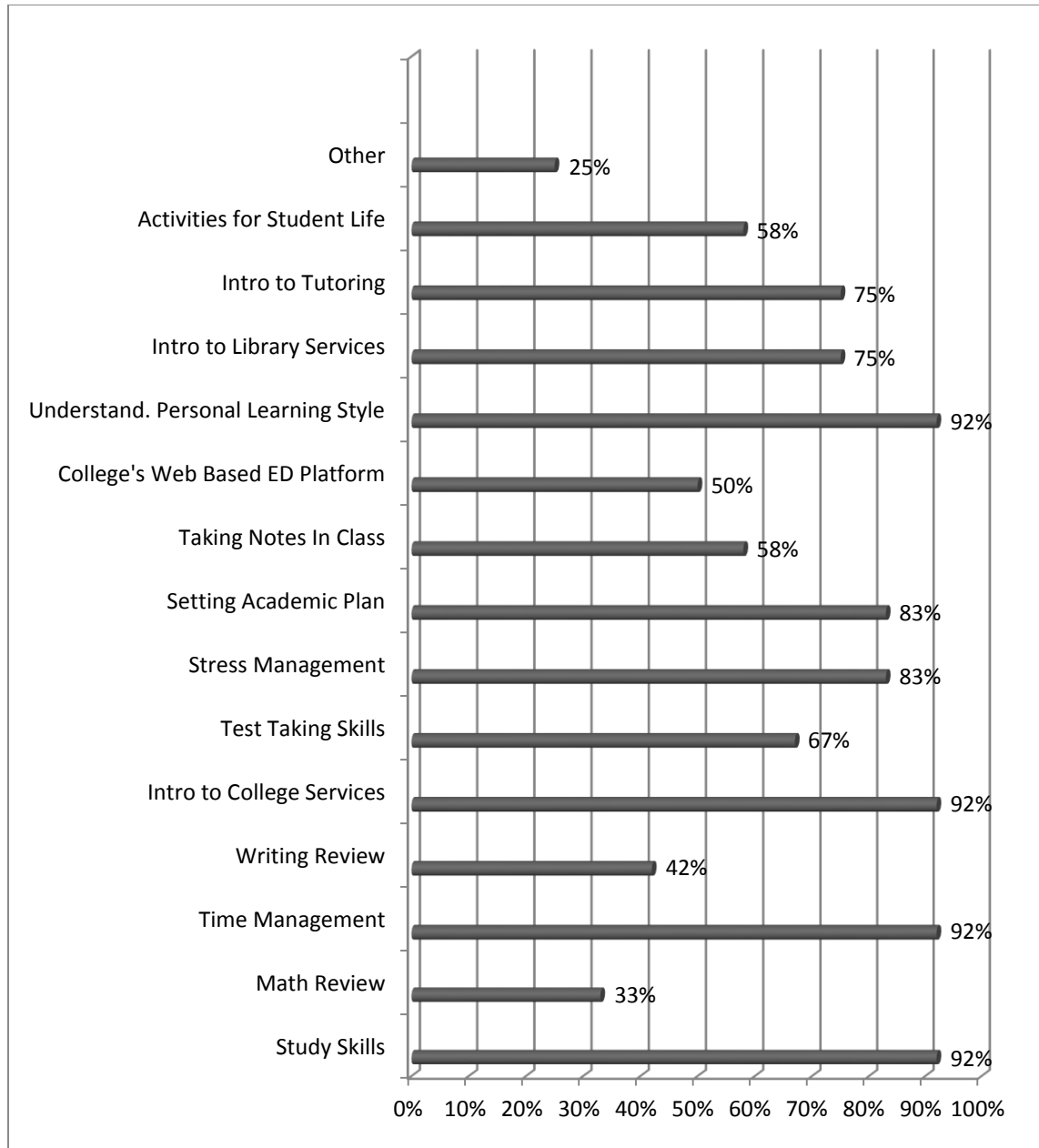


Figure 26. Success course topics.

Question 27: What departments participated with the development, implementation, teaching, and the assessment of your college’s success course(s)? Based on answers to this question, it appeared that each of the responsibilities was assigned to a different designated lead in each college. The responses were very diverse. Table 20 represents the departments primarily responsible for success courses.

Table 20. Responsibility by Department (%)

Department	Develop/ design	Implement/ coordinate/ support	Teaching	Assessment/ evaluation
Advising/ Counseling	8–32	5–20	6–24	6–24
Math	4–27	2–13	6–40	3–20
Language Arts	5–26	3–16	8–42	3–20
Career Development	5–29	7–41	3–18	2–12
Library	3–20	7–47	4–27	1–7
Student Affairs	8–29	9–32	5–18	6–21
Other	5–23	7–32	5–23	5–23

Participants’ Face-to-Face Interviews

One administrator interviewee was selected from each of the six ICCB designated community college peer groups. Interviews were conducted on the administrators’ campuses. Each participant signed an agreement granting permission to be interviewed prior to the start of the interview. Interviews were scheduled for 1 hour. The 1-hour time span also provided the opportunity for the researcher to ask questions and to probe more deeply as needed.

Participants were provided a copy of the interview questions prior to the interviewer arriving at the institution. An interview script was utilized by the interviewer to guarantee the

exact same 11 questions were asked of all six participants. Probing questions were used to clarify and to allow for expansion in answering the main question(s).

Handwritten notes were taken at each interview. In addition, all interview sessions were audio-recorded. Recording is the preferred method of data collection in qualitative research, according to Creswell (2007). To ensure accuracy and to eliminate the possibility of instrument malfunction, which would have resulted in failure to capture the interview, two recorders were simultaneously utilized at each interview.

The following are the 11 interview questions and the responses from the representatives of each of the six institutions.

Interview Question 1: Describe the college success course(s) at your institution.

Responses to this question by representatives of the individual community colleges were as follows.

MMCC. The administrator at MMCC reported having a variety of “clinical initiatives” that address student success. The COMPASS entrance exam is required for student enrollment in these initiatives. The administrator noted that first-time full-time students are only required to enroll in success initiatives based on low reading, writing, and math COMPASS scores. However, the administrator did stress enrollment in success course(s) is not mandatory for all incoming freshmen. This administrator stated, “Success classes are basically designed for athletes and first-generation college students.”

The administrator also said, “At MMCC, it is a multidisciplinary group that gets together to figure out ways on how students can succeed.” Consequently, success courses are presented using a variety of techniques. According to the administrator, success classes can be held as or at (a) traditional class with topics such as note taking, personal responsibilities, or how to study; (b)

Library Success Center, with computer-aided tutorials and peer tutors; (c) the traditional college credit class offered in two parts, allowing the content to be presented at a slower pace; or (d) as a contextualized class presented in conjunction with several developmental classes.

Just as there is a cross-disciplinary group that plans strategies for student success, this administrator also discussed the cross-disciplinary group (social science, art and music, math, and English departments) of instructors teaching in success initiatives.

WCCC. The administrator at WCCC stated, “Success course(s) was/were developed as part of a Title III grant project called “Student Success Interventions.” This administrator discussed the purpose of the grant, which was to assist in putting processes and procedures in place for retention, completion, and ultimately success.

The administrator affirmed that WCCC makes available a first-year experience program for first-time full-time freshmen. This course is mandatory for full-time freshmen regardless of COMPASS scores. This administrator further discussed that in some cases, COMPASS scores will also result in students being placed in certain success courses that also require personality and learning assessments.

The interviewee stated, “The first-year experience program has two parts.” Part 1 consists of a half-day orientation workshop conducted by counselors prior to the beginning of the semester. This administrator noted that the orientation day provided an assortment of information for students. This information includes (a) an introduction to college policies and procedures, (b) how to choose classes, and (c) how to schedule and enroll in college classes.

Part 2 of the freshman success course experience is the actual enrollment into the required College 101 course. This administrator noted, “College 101 is an 8-week course introducing a variety of topics.”

TPCC. The administrator from TPCC referred to success course(s) as “guided pathways to success designed to better empower the student and assist them in being more successful in their college courses, transferring and in their careers [*sic*].” Additionally highlighted was that success course(s) are required for students placing in two or more developmental education classes, as determined by COMPASS placement scores.

The administrator from TPCC said, “Success courses at TPCC encompasses a lot of our different success courses and have a strong partnership with area high schools.” According to this administrator, success course(s) represent an attempt to improve the high school students’ college assessment process, their application processes, and their seniors’ visitation days on the TPCC campus. This administrator also stressed that the high school partnership is all part of bringing high school students on campus as early and as frequently as possible to acclimate them to college culture before they actually start at the institution.

The interviewee emphasized that once high school students enter TPCC, they qualify for the Life Success Course. The administrator emphasized success classes offer from 1 to 3 transferable elective credits and the topics of success classes covered personal success, academic success, and career success. The curriculum for these three classes was revised and customized for the TPCC population utilizing the textbook *On Course* (Downing, 2010) and Downing’s principles of active learning. This administrator stated,

We intentionally try to infuse that language and those eight principles into the entire student experience. The idea being that students will encounter that consistent language and consistent philosophy ...helps them to be more empowered and to be more successful.

TWCC. According to the administrator interviewed at TWCC, the TWCC college success initiatives have many different components. As a consequence, this administrator stated, “There is a whole division, which is college readiness, which leads to college success.” The

administrator disclosed that the TWCC College 101 course is a 1-credit hour class and is a requirement for all first-time first-semester students. It was further acknowledged that the course(s) were primarily taught by a cross-disciplinary adjunct faculty. The administrator stressed, “No one is dedicated to simply teaching college success.”

This administrator also indicated that in some designated success course(s), there were peer mentors, while others worked closely with student life to actually align events with College Success 101 course. This administrator emphasized, “This partnership allows students to get additional supplemental instruction beyond the course.”

OJCC. The OJCC success course(s), First-Year Experience Orientation, was noted by the administrator as being mandatory for all first-time full-time degree-seeking students. This administrator revealed, “If for some reason students fail the course or fail to complete the course within the first semester, it would have to be retaken.” The administrator emphasized that success course(s) must be completed before students can earn a degree from the institution.

The administrator further emphasized that the course is divided into three components. Component 1 is a day on campus, which takes place before fall semester classes start. The administrator said, “This day provides campus tours, a variety of speakers with an array of information a carnival atmosphere with different booths.” Information is disseminated concerning student clubs and organizations, financial aid, college overview, and online accounts.

Component 2 takes place during the first week of fall semester when students arrive on campus for the semester. The administrator noted during this period, “Students attend a 1-hour prescheduled workshop to assist them in understanding their individual schedules.” Component 2 also assists students in locating campus resources.

Component 3 was highlighted as being an online component consisting of various modules on a variety of topics. According to the administrator, these are topics that must be completed by students. The administrator stated, “These modules are designed to further familiarize new students to the campus and how to have a successful college experience.”

MJCC. The administrator at MJCC responded, “MJCC does not really have what you could call a first-semester success course,” because success courses are not specifically targeted at first-semester students. This administrator said, “Specific support for first generation and first-time college students is provided through TRIO programming, if students meet TRIO’s criteria.” TRIO offers academic support, introduction to college culture, money management, and other topics for first-year full-time students.

The administrator at MJCC was quick to point out that the college has two liberal arts success courses that represent the outcome of a 5-year, Title III grant. This administrator indicated, “The purpose was to help students to be successful and to become college completers.” The administrator declared that success courses at MJCC assist students in three major categories: academic needs, personal needs, and developmental needs.

The MJCC administrator identified two processes for enrolling in success course(s) at the community college. The first method allows students to voluntarily enroll in a success course. The second method is compulsory enrollment for designated students. With regards to compulsory enrollment into success courses, students fall into in any or all of the following three circumstances: (a) placed on academic probation, (b) placed on financial probation, and/or (c) participating in sports. In addition, this administrator stressed, “All students placed on probation must take a success course in order to reenter traditional college classes.”

At MJCC, the academic support center was the focal point for success course components. The administrator explained that the center was a place where students could study, obtain an academic coach, utilize computers, receive a peer tutor or mentors, and participate in online tutorials. Lastly, the MJCC administrator discussed the curriculum for success courses at the college. This administrator acknowledged that the curriculum used is based on the *On Course* (Downing, 2010) textbook, a program of active learning. The administrator stated, “The curriculum was designed to prepare students for making right decisions and taking responsibility for their lives.”

Interview Question 2: What are the primary catalysts for establishing a college success course(s) at your college? Responses to this question by representatives of the individual community colleges were as follows.

MMCC. When asked what the primary catalysts for establishing the success course(s) were, the administrator at MMCC replied, “We care.” This administrator went on to say, “We struggled with student success and pass rates.” The MMCC administrator expressed surprise to learn the completion and graduation numbers for the community college, as a whole, were not good. This administrator quickly stressed that the president wanted more done to improve these rates, consequently driving the establishment of the student success courses. According to the interviewee, “At MMCC, the bottom line was, *What we can do to help students get what they needed to get through college?*”

WCCC. The administrator at WCCC noted the major catalyst driving the establishing of the first-year first-semester success course(s) was the Title III grant project. This administrator followed up and said, “The Title III grant was driven by the low retention and success rates of those at-risk populations, the students placed in developmental education, part-time adults, and

online learners.” This administrator acknowledged the attempt by leaders at WCCC to figure out what was within their infrastructure that could be improved to better assist the students also as a driving force for developing student success courses. According to this administrator, at the time of the Title III grant, retention and completion rates were between 40% and 50%.

TPCC. The TPCC administrator emphasized, “Like any community college, we want to see our students doing better, staying longer, and completing.” This administrator noted it was not one particular thing but a general desire to have increased persistence and completion rates that acted as the catalyst for establishing success course(s) at TPCC.

TWCC. At TWCC regarding success courses and their establishment, the administrator stated, “The course(s) is actually about 5 years old.” The administrator identified the catalysts for establishing success courses were to increase students’ success and the incoming freshmen.

OJCC. With regards to success courses and primary catalysis for establishing student success course(s), the administrator at OJCC replied,

We wanted to try to figure out kind of an overall way to get quite a bit of information to our students . . . in a single effort. In addition, reasons for establishing were driven by the need to help new students to get acclimated to different things on campus, processes and procedures.

This administrator quickly indicated the completion rates at OJCC have always been high. When asked how OJCC accounts for this phenomenon, this administrator’s response was, “It’s hard to say do we have better completion because of the first-year experience or is it because of other things that we do?”

MJCC. The representative for MJCC answered, “It started with our developmental education courses and seeing a need for revision of that curriculum and . . . receiving a Title Three grant that gave us the funds to restructure everything.” Furthermore, the administrator highlighted the caliber of students entering MJCC; nontraditional students, returning students,

mid-20s and above students, single mothers, and single fathers all needing more assistance and support to stay on track as motivation for establishing success courses. Ultimately, the administrator stated, “It was just the logical next step for us.”

Interview Question 3: What information or data was involved in the design of the college success course(s)? Responses to this question by representatives of the individual community colleges were as follows.

MMCC. The administrator interviewed at MMCC acknowledged, “We looked at things in other schools and looked at our own creative work.” This administrator quickly went on to stress, “MMCC has done a good job using some ‘old tricks’ with new programs.” The administrator from MMCC was indicated that data were collected highlighting the general needs of the students as well as the college community at large.

WCCC. The WCCC administrator’s response to the question was, “The Title III grant was looking at the numbers of our students who needed the assistance, at-risk groups.” At WCCC, administrators also reviewed the success courses and first-year experience programs at other institutions to glean what could strengthen the retention of first-year students at WCCC. According to the administrator, data were collected and information provided from their academic process pilot program, a program requiring students with low GPAs to complete an academic success workshop. The interviewee stressed that, at WCCC, they were trying to capture students during the first year. According to this administrator, for the design process, they also considered data collected by the Department of Institutional Research.

TPCC. As indicated by the administrator with regards to data involved in the design of the TPCC success courses, TPCC utilized *On Course* (Downing, 2010) because they were “using

data collected from about 12 different schools that had compiled information after implementing the *On Course* text.”

Additionally, the administrator indicated that, at WCCC, information was collected regarding students’ overall GPAs, early alert system usage, probation numbers, and persistence rates at WCCC. She further stated, “Our data is messy and some of it is good and some of it’s just not clean.” Consequently, at TPCC, they are looking at developing a data warehouse to assist in doing a more effective job of collecting data.

TWCC. The administrator at TWCC highlighted looking at retention rates from first and second semesters, academic success, and grades of C or higher within a course as aids in the design of success course(s).

OJCC. At OJCC, the administrator highlighted visiting other institutions to observe what worked and what did not work for those institutions. The administrator also acknowledged using a book regarding successful strategies for college students. However, the administrator could not recall the name of the book.

MJCC. The major design involvement referenced by the MJCC administrator was the book, *On Course* (Downing, 2010). According to the administrator, *On Course* was used in the design for both success courses. This administrator stated, “Pretty much, the author is an expert on student success and retention.” The principles of *On Course* were emphasized and also used in setting up programs aligned with the MJCC Academic Success Center. Additionally, informational data collected from developmental courses were utilized.

Interview Question 4: Who was involved in designing the course(s)? Responses to this question by representatives of the individual community colleges were as follows.

WCCC. When asked this question, the administrator at WCCC identified the following individuals as being involved as part of the designing team:

- dean of academic advising,
- dean of counseling,
- dean of enrichment programs,
- assistant dean of new student retention,
- director of resource development,
- content faculty, and
- Institutional Research Department.

TPCC. According to the TPCC administrator, generally all departments were involved in the design of the course(s). This administrator said, “A team of deans, faculty (full-time and adjunct), and career development, counseling staff, and testing staff” were involved in the designing of the TPCC success course(s).

TWCC. The director of student life and the assistant dean in student development were the only two individuals involved in the design of the student success course(s) at TWCC. The administrator did not emphasize that at TWCC, academic affairs nor counseling/advising were involved in the designing process.

OJCC. At OJCC, the administrator acknowledged that only the special populations was involved in the design of the success course(s).

MJCC. The MJCC representative identified that the dean of instruction, the dean of transfer education, and the entire math faculty were involved in the design of the student success course(s). In addition, this administrator stated, “There was a grant coordinator who presided over the academic support center, a data person, an expert in developmental education, a learning

specialist, advising department, student services, a student success coach, and both professional and peer tutors.” The administrator was noted that, when the success courses were designed, there was no department of Institution effectiveness from which to draw data.

Interview Question 5: What are the components of modules of the college success course(s)? Responses to this question by representatives of the individual community colleges were as follows.

MMCC. The MMCC administrator revealed the components of success course(s) at the community college consisted of (a) developmental education courses, (b) bridge programs, (c) the Student Success Center, (d) marginal classes, and (e) contextualized classes. In addition, this administrator stated, “Three of our math courses are marginalized.” In regard to the marginal courses, the administrator emphasized that students have the opportunity to retake only the portion of a class they failed. For example, if a student takes a math course (11A and 11B), passes the first part (11A), but does not pass the second half of the course (11B), then the student would only need to repeat the second part (11B), the part failed, not, the entire course.

WCCC. The WCCC administrator identified the components of their success course(s) as consisting of

- a half-day orientation,
- an 8-week college class,
- a library visit,
- an educational planning session,
- various seminars (differences between college and high school, what motivates you as a student, how to stay interested),
- learning style assessment,

- personality assessment,
- note taking and testing taking, and
- reading comprehension.

TPCC. At TPCC, the components of the success course(s) are the chapters in the book *On Course* (Downing, 2010). As emphasized by the administrator, the focus is building personal success, career success, and academic success. This administrator said, “Within this, we also make sure and look at information literacy, like library research skills, research analysis, and technology literacy.” The administrator emphasized that these elements were all Blackboard supplemental components, assisting students in becoming familiar with using the learning management system at TPCC. Additionally, this administrator stated, “Overall though, our overarching theme is the *On Course* principles, those eight principles for student success.”

TWCC. The administrator at TWCC emphasized emotional intelligence as a primary component of the success course(s). This administrator stated, “The components work with D. Fink’s model in terms of academic preparation, moving from basic knowledge all the way up to synthesis, analysis, and reflective experience.” With further regard to the components, the administrator identified an academic pathway, career exploration, becoming a motivated learner, a chat book (in which students have the opportunity to identify and explore words and ideas), and library research.

OJCC. The OJCC administrator’s response to this question indicated the orientation day, the 1-hour classroom session, and the online modules (with varying topics such as time management, study skills, financial literacy, and student life) as the components of the student success course(s).

MJCC. The components of success course(s) at MJCC, according to the administrator, included all the topics and chapters in *On Course* (Downing, 2010). In regard to the different components offered in the two courses, the administrator said, “103 is more of a preparedness to academic awareness, whereas the 100 course is really a transition course.” The administrator explained that the 100-level course components are note-taking skills, financial literacy, study skills, reading comprehension, and budgeting time. This administrator said,

103 is really more academic-oriented and so in the 103, that’s where you’re going to get study skills, time allocation, time management, how to be a successful college student, how to become a lifelong learner, and emotional issues associated with college.

Additionally, this administrator acknowledged that the second success course was more academic. In this course the student encounters components such as accepting personal responsibility, self-motivation, self-management, and inner dependence.

Interview Question 6: How often do you assess the success course(s)? Responses to this question by representatives of the individual community colleges were as follows.

MMCC. The MMCC administrator informed the interviewer that the student success courses are assessed semester by semester. The administrator also indicated that at MMCC, the community college uses placement scores as a form of student success course assessment. The administrator also implied the use of student satisfaction surveys as well as other informal anecdotal notes.

WCCC. The administrator at WCCC revealed the success course(s) at WCCC were assessed at the end of each semester in the form of a semester written final. In addition, instructors are evaluated by the students.

TPCC. According to the administrator at TPCC, instructors of success courses are evaluated every semester. The administrator explained that TPCC had recently begun to collect data to assess their success courses and the information would not be available until next year.

The TPCC administrator acknowledged having a team to plan what should be evaluated and to run queries to indicate what components are successful.

TWCC. The TWCC administrator acknowledged assessing success courses at the end of every semester. In addition, students have the opportunity to evaluate success course instructors at the end of each semester. Student course surveys are administered at the end of each session. This administrator emphasized that TWCC provided both formative and summative assessments.

OJCC. In regard to how the success course is assessed, the OJCC administrator stated, “The coordinator usually does some kind of assessment each year.” For example, the end of a semester, the coordinator might ask students how satisfied they were with the course. OJCC also provides a pre- and posttest for the students in success courses.

MJCC. At MJCC, success courses are being assessed. The response from MJCC’s administrator was, “Same as the other college courses.” At the end of the semester, data are collected from grades, student surveys, and instructors’ surveys.

Interview Question 7: What are the methods used for assessments? Responses to this question by representatives of the individual community colleges were as follows.

MMCC. With regards to this question, the following were noted by the administrator from MMCC: grades, placement scores, refresher course outcomes, and program completion rates. This administrator emphasized, “The idea is getting in is easy but, they’ve got to get out.”

WCCC. According to the representative from WCCC, the methods identified for assessing success courses were successful course completion, semester-to-semester retention, student course reviews, pre- and post-surveys, and student evaluation of the instructors.

TPCC. At TPCC, according to the administrator, community college leadership are looking for general student success. This success is measured in terms of students’ persistence in

courses, grades, and completing their intended programs. Methods utilized for assessing success courses also included student evaluation of the course and student evaluation of instructors. This administrator added, “Very basic assessment artifacts are going to be used to assess students’ learning outcomes.”

TWCC. The administrator from TWCC indicated the methods used to assess success courses were formative and from a students’ perspective. The community college also employed reflective journal writing, student assessments, and faculty evaluations.

OJCC. The administrator from OJCC noted that the method used at OJCC was “home grown. As of now, there is no assessing the success courses. However, there is a team working on it.”

MJCC. The administrator from MJCC reported utilizing the COMPASS placement scores after those students are placed in classes, and surveys are completed at the end of each session. Survey results are tracked by the Student Support Center.

Interview Question 8: Who is involved in the assessment process? Responses to this question by representatives of the individual community colleges were as follows.

MMCC. When asked this question, the administrator from MMCC said, “To some extent, I have to say everyone. . . . My soft answer to the question is everyone because of the leadership.” When asked to explain, this administrator noted that MMCC has changed and the college is now utilizing more assessments because of the culture of the student population. Therefore, there are levels of involvement. The instructional research people provide overall assessment information—for example, grades, placement scores, and completion rates—whereas another level of involvement is managed by the instructors. Then, to a certain extent, there are

the students who are also involved in the assessment process. Students are regularly asked to complete satisfaction surveys.

WCCC. The administrator from WCCC replied, “We look to our experts on campus. It’s people that [*sic*] actually have the knowledge of doing things. . . . So we have people with different experiences, so we tap into what’s here.” This administrator noted that a Title III grant provided a student tracking specialist who collects and analyzes success course data. Other individuals involved in assessing these courses are the deans (academic and student development), the assessment coordinator for student development, and assessment coordinator for student affairs, and student focus groups. The administrator also indicated on a broader scale the institution is involved in an academic quality improvement program, saying, “Assessments are becoming more and more important, how we’re assessing our programs today and what we are doing with the data becomes a good part of how we do our continuous improvement.”

TPCC. The TPCC administrator identified a variety of individuals who are involved in the assessment of the success courses offered at the community college. The following were distinguished as being involved at some point in the assessment process: (a) the instructors of courses (completing learning assessments throughout the semesters and grading); (b) the faculty involved in the curriculum and assessment committee; (c) the general education/developmental education group; (d) all past success course instructors; (e) some administrators; and (f) the institution assessment planners, who are part of the strategic plan group.

TWCC. According to the administrator at TWCC, the individuals acknowledged as involved in the assessment of the success courses were students, faculty, the institutional research office (data ranger), and the vice president of student affairs.

OJCC. The OJCC administrator said, “We have a committee that does it; the committee chair is the orientation coordinator.” In addition, assessment is built into each online module. Students assess each module upon completion; therefore, the students are also involved to a certain extent.

MJCC. With regard to the question of who is involved in assessing success course(s) at MJCC, the administrator said, “The dean of transfer education, the learning specialist, the coordinator of distance learning and instructional design, and the institutional effectiveness department are all involved in the assessment of success courses at MJCC.”

Interview Question 9: What metrics or means are used by the college to demonstrate the success course? Responses to this question by representatives of the individual community colleges were as follows.

MMCC. The administrator from MMCC indicated course documentation, such as the course syllabus, and contextualization courses strategies (e.g., smaller written exercises) as means to demonstrate the students’ success. The administrator then emphasized that leaders at MMCC use a “scorecard.” The scorecard provides a snapshot performance record, semester by semester, for each success initiative. This measure demonstrates what is working and what is not working, ultimately determining which success initiatives are retained by the institution and which ones are dropped.

WCCC. Regarding metrics or means to demonstrate the success of courses, the WCCC administrator noted the following: (a) viewing courses attempted; (b) then viewing those courses completed with a C or better; and (c) viewing the receptivity survey findings. This administrator explained receptivity as “a pre- and post-format, but given at one time so a student can actually think about where they are in the beginning of a workshop, and where they want to be at the

end.” The administrator also noted, to demonstrate success the impact of such courses at WCCC, the outcomes of the focus groups and faculty evaluations are utilized.

TPCC. When asked the question concerning metrics and means of demonstrating success courses, the TPCC administrator identified several aspects. Among them were (a) completion of the courses, (b) persistence on to the next semester, (c) future success in college-level courses, and (d) ultimate completion of the intended credential. This administrator also stated, “Obviously, the expectation is not that this one particular program or courses is the only thing involved in that success.”

TWCC. To explain the metrics demonstrating effective college success courses, the administrator from at TWCC replied, “Students’ retention from first-semester to second semester, to graduation, to student academic success, and students’ satisfaction.”

OJCC. The OJCC administrator said, “Well again, of course we want to push for completion and we believe that it helps, but it’s hard to say that was the particular initiative that has driven good completion rates.” This administrator also pointed out the record of OJCC being recognized for its high graduation rates.

MJCC. At MJCC, the administrator discussed the use of additional funding, which helped to support the improvement of technology. The improved technology allowed MJCC to showcase the numbers of successes they have and to demonstrate these successful numbers graphically. At MJCC, according to the administrator, leaders are in the process of developing metrics and means to use to demonstrate the success of these course(s).

Interview Question 10: Over the last few years, what changes have been made as a result of these findings? Responses to this question by representatives of the individual community colleges were as follows.

MMCC. The administrator at MMCC emphasized the college had added more programs and new contextualized courses over the last few years.

WCCC. The administrator from WCCC said, “Looking at what we found out, then scaling up different projects.” In addition, this administrator highlighted an increase in technology in success courses and the addition of a course entitled “Pathways to Success,” which provides a checklist whereby everything students need to graduate is listed. Students are encouraged to self-track and check off accomplishments toward goals. The administrator also discussed the addition of an academic advising syllabus. The advising syllabus provides required benchmarks for academic success. According to WCCC, advisors in the community college are required to check with students at strategic times to ensure students are reaching and surpassing the benchmarks set for successful outcomes.

TPCC. The TPCC administrator said, “I guess it really depends on how broad you want to go with student success courses.” The administrator indicated the curriculum change to the *On Course* (Downing, 2010) text was a major change. The administrator further added: (a) there is a new requirement is for all developmental education students to enroll in the success course, to improve their non-cognitive and non-academic skills; (b) there is an increase in the offerings of general student development classes to high school juniors and seniors; (c) there is an increase in conversations with industry and business to identify workforce needs; and (d) there is “another thing that we implemented just this last year . . . a program for students who are on academic probation”; and (e) there is a re-entry requirement to enroll in success courses before a student can re-enroll in college-level classes following academic probation.

TWCC. With regard to what changes have been made as a result of the success course, the administrator at TWCC said, “They moved it from the student services to the academic side

of the house, because we wanted to have a stronger ownership from the academic part of the college.” According to this administrator, the move was important because of the desire to add more critical thinking, emotional development, and the effective piece of learning to the success course(s).

Second, a cultural competency piece was added. Third, this administrator said, “We have students to use the *Desire to Learn* component of the course because we believe students need to have a good sense of how to use that piece.” Third, this administrator noted there has been a career component added with career coaches.

The administrator further emphasized that at TWCC, leadership was working hard not to let the success course(s) become a “catchall for everything that everybody wants and thinks a freshman should do. We really believe that the emotional intelligence piece of the course is really the largest value piece that we can give these students.”

OJCC. The OJCC representative indicated that the community college has not made many changes other than increasing the offering of days to visit the campus and the addition of components to the online module (the High One financial aid debit card usage). This administrator said, “This was one of the things that we added to the training because they could never seem to hear it enough that this is how they’re going to get their financial aid.”

MJCC. In regard to this question, the administrator from MJCC noted that most of the changes have been expansions and the community college is just now beginning to track success courses. The other new things included a TRIO grant that requires all new at-risk students to meet with an advisor to set up a college plan and then, from that point, they can enroll. The administrator noted, “They have a regular orientation. We’re small enough that we can be hands on.”

Interview Question 11: Based on lessons learned from running the college success course at your institution, what would you change in your current program to improve it?

Responses to this question by representatives of the individual community colleges were as follows.

MMCC. Based on lessons learned, the MMCC administrator said, “I don’t have an answer for that . . . because I don’t think anything is wrong.” This administrator noted that at MMCC, leaders understand everything that is tried will not work; therefore, some initiatives will be eliminated. This administrator quickly stressed, “I thing I wrestle most with is when it comes to how much is enough, what’s too much, how much is healthy, and how much is hurting.” Additionally, this interviewee said, “We just have to look to the data to see what to change.”

WCCC. Components that would be changed at WCCC, according to the administrator, are (a) to provide advisors to work with part-time students; (b) to work more with special populations to help them meet their needs; (c) to take into consideration “the impact of collaboration and building relationships”; (d) “to learn what others are doing so I can better do my job”; and (e) to “look at the big picture.”

TPCC. To improve the current course(s) based on lessons learned, according to the administrator at TPCC, leaders at the community college are going to (a) improve their early alert system from a manual system to an electronic system, (b) increase manpower to provide more personal advising for freshmen, (c) improve the data loop, and (d) offer additional *On Course* (Downing, 2010) training throughout the institution.

TWCC. Based on lessons learned in running the college success course(s), the interviewee at TWCC indicated the following component changes could be made to improve current student success course(s): (a) increase the credit hours offered per semester for success

course(s), (b) clarify the contextual differences among success course(s), (c) increase the number of full-time success course(s) instructor(s), and (d) provide advisors for part-time students.

OJCC. The OJCC administrator explained the college would increase the face-to-face time with students and increase in the project-based learning (i.e. service learning, activities), and provide a planner for each freshman containing pertinent college information.

MJCC. The administrator at MJCC emphasized that increasing the funding would help to supplement the success course(s) and increased faculty use of Angel would improve the success courses. Angel would allow for 24-hour access 7 days a week and could be beneficial on snowy days. The administrator also noted that increasing the credit value for the success course would be an improvement because of the volume of information required.

Documents

Brochures, college catalogues, flyers, newsletters, and other documents from participating colleges were collected for the present study. These documents were significant and helpful in identifying the components of success courses. Documents from each of the six administrators interviewed and their respective college web sites were also reviewed for information pertaining to success courses. There were both similarities and differences among the colleges. The majority of the colleges did promote success courses, while a small fraction did not. However, all six administrators expressed that their institutions provided a variety of support services for students entering college for the first time, although the support services were not always easily accessible and delivered in a timely manner. For additional support, all printed documents provided schedules of time and location where support services could be obtained.

Field Notes

Reflective field notes. Reflective field notes are important in research because they provide an additional dimension to the findings and serve to further triangulate the data. According to Merriam (2009), Creswell (2007), and Patton (1990), field notes are used to describe the setting and activities and to derive meaning from the perspective of those individuals being observed. Therefore, a checklist of elements that could be observed was used, as was presented by Merriam and Creswell. The checklist consists of observing the physical setting, the description and characteristics of the participants, the activities and interactions of participants, the content and conversations (nonverbal and verbal), and other items such as attire and physical space. The reflective notes for this research study focused on the settings in which each of the six administrators of success courses were located within their respective institutions. Interviewees' offices were located in various areas on campus. Each individual's office ranged in size from small to large. Table 21 delineates the findings.

Table 21. Reflective Field Notes of Findings by Institution

Institution	Findings
MMCC	Interviewee's office was located in the basement of the athletic building. The office was a small room with desk, two file cabinets, two small bookcases, and two chairs for visitors. The office had no outside light. There were no windows to the outside. However, it had a large window overlooking the track and the outer hall. There was a secretary's office on the outside. On the wall behind the desk, the interviewee displayed credentials. It appeared as though this individual was just moving in. The office was not near the library or other college resources and services.
WCCC	Interviewee's office was large and located in a building next to the administrative building. The office was among other offices within the building. The floor plan was more rectangular with high walls and high windows (about 3 feet from the ceiling), so one could not see out of the windows. The desk was located at one end of the room with a credenza and file cabinets. On the side wall were more file cabinets with artwork and plants on top of the cabinets. The opposite side wall had nothing on it and no window to the outside hall. On the opposite end of the room from the desk contained a table and two chairs (the first objects visible when entering the room. There was also a coat rack near the table. The office was not located by the library, but other college resources were located in the building.
TPCC	The interviewee's office was grouped with two other offices in the main building. There was a waiting area on the outside where two secretaries were located. The office was medium in size with a large horseshoe-shaped desk near a large window, overlooking the common area. There were files on either side of the desk. Also displayed on the desktop, as well as on top of the file cabinets, were family pictures. In addition, there were plants on top of the file cabinets. Two chairs were located in front of the desk for visitors. Behind the chairs was a credenza with another plant. The one bookcase displayed reference books. The office was located above the library and in the building with other college resources and services.
TWCC	The interviewee's office was located in a building other than on the main campus. The office had white wicker furniture, a small desk, and three bookcases. There was a shared secretary and a waiting room outside of the office, which was grouped with three other offices. The office was small and located in the interior of the building with no windows to the outside. Introductions were made in the office and it was determined, because of the size of the office, to move to the conference room for more space. The conference room was large, with a wooden table that seated a minimum of 18 (eight on both sides and two at either end of the

Institution	Findings
OJCC	<p>table). There was a projector screen on the wall farthest and opposite the entrance. Also on the wall was a whiteboard and markers. The side walls had additional chairs and a refrigerator on the left side wall. The door through which we entered had a long vertical window and the outside hall could be viewed. The interviewee set on one side of the table, one seat down and on the opposite side from where the interviewer was seated. The office was not near the library or other resource services. The interviewee's office was located in the main building. The office was grouped with other resources and services such as the TRIO office, STAR office, and tutor rooms. There was a large waiting room with three secretaries behind the desk.</p>
	<p>The office was large, sunny, and bright because of the four large windows on the side wall. The windows were from the ceiling to about 3 to 4 feet from the floor. At the entrance to the office, there was a large open space with a 6-foot table with two chairs on both sides. We sat at the table.</p>
	<p>One could not help but notice the green plants all around the office, both large and small plants. Further in the office was the desk. The desk was large and redwood with matching wrap-around file cabinets and a wooden credenza on the left side wall. There were also four wooden two-drawer file cabinets placed alongside the side wall. In front of the desk there were two chairs for visitors. On the wall behind the desk, there were two wooden wardrobes with what appeared to be a wet bar in between with a refrigerator and a microwave oven. There were family pictures in the personal space. The campus was small and had only the one building; therefore, the library and other college resources were all located in the same building.</p>
MJCC	<p>The interviewee's office was medium in size and located in a large satellite location. The office was located on the second floor in a corner of the building. The floor plan was more of a rectangular shape with two windows viewing the outside. One window was located in the front of the office and the other window in the back of the office. Also in the front of the office was a metal desk with two metal file cabinets. Between the front window and the right wall, there was another set of low file cabinets. Along the right wall there were more tall file cabinets leading up to the back window.</p> <p>At the back of the office was a round table with three chairs. The table was in front of the back window. The interview was conducted at the table. There were a few family pictures on the desk and there were a few pictures of students on the wall. The library and other college resources were located in this single building.</p>

Observational Field Notes

The field notes provided additional insight for the research from yet another viewpoint. It was observed that, in some cases, success courses were primarily designed for athletes. In these cases, the administrator's office was located either in the gym field house or in close proximity to the gym. There was also a portion of the colleges whose success course coordinators' offices were not located within the main building along with other college support services. In these instances, there were no visual references to success courses.

On the other hand, there were several institutions that provided a plethora of information promoting success courses and requiring all faculty to train in the *On Course* (Downing, 2010) principles. As a matter of fact, one college has gone so far as to infuse *On Course* language throughout the institution. Furthermore, this institution is in the process of training all college administrators, faculty, staff, and those in the community who are interested in using the *On Course* strategy.

A Priori Themes Analysis of Findings

Astin's Student Involvement Theory

Astin (1999) ascertained that students need to be involved and engaged in the learning process in order to become college completers. He advocated the IEO model to guide student success. Astin declares that students' prior experiences and environmental inputs, as well as students' engagement in the new environment, will make the difference in students' outputs. Ultimately, students only get out of success courses the amount of time and effort they put into them.

Research Question 1: What catalysts are instrumental to the implementation of the college success course instituted by the college? Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement

stresses IEO as necessary factors for students to become successful college completers. This theory supports the interactions and manipulations of the components to create successful students. Astin's (1999) student involvement theory represent the first construct for the conceptual framework of the present study.

Astin's (1999) input component takes into account attributes students possess upon entering college, such as college preparedness, family support, performance on college entry examines (test scores), and other skills and demographics. These entering attributes all contributed to the implementation of success courses. For instance, according to the web survey, when individual components such as test scores were considered for college entry, 42% of entering first-year students performed low on college placement scores, which was determined based on COMPASS testing in 60% of the responding institutions. The other 40% utilized other tests, which provided similar conclusions.

Additionally, the study findings revealed that administrators also employed a variety of other input information for establishing success courses. For example, according to the research findings, 67% of the administrators interviewed acknowledged investigating the overall number of students scoring into developmental education classes as input information for success courses. Furthermore, the total number of developmental classes into which individual students scored was used as information employed in the implementation of success courses.

Another a priori theme with Astin's (1999) involvement theory, environmental input, was used to determine during the research that students lacked college awareness. In face-to-face interviews of selected community college administrators, 83% indicated students' lack of college awareness also acted as catalysts for establishing success courses on their campus. Students were unaware of how to appropriately interact with the college environment in matters such as how to

secure financial aid, what college courses to take, how to seek tutorial help, and how to interact with instructors, just to name a few.

The importance of students' past and present interaction with inputs and their environmental manipulations led Astin to develop his five postulates for students' positive college outputs. These postulates address students' strengths and weaknesses. Astin's postulates also establish a premise for how to strengthen weaknesses and transition students to become college achievers. Postulates 1 and 3 appear to demonstrate a greater relationship to Research Question 1.

Astin's Postulate 1: Involvement requires the investment of psychosocial and physical energy. Astin (1985) states, "It is not so much what the individual thinks or feels but what he or she does that defines and identifies involvement" (p. 135). The research findings revealed evidence of this postulate in the academic, sociological, and psychological development of students enrolled in success courses, in addition to an increase in students' environmental involvements.

When involvement is identified as what students do, the findings revealed that to function in the college community, students must first become aware of what the expectations are or what they (the students) should do. For example, according to the administrators interviewed, college expectations and acclimations were issues students needed to know to persist in college. However, acclimation alone falls short of the goal of college achievement. There had to be other measures in place to activate the investment of time and energy.

All institutions from which representatives were surveyed had mechanisms in place to assist students with acclimation to college life. For example, of the web survey respondents, 100% offered modules concerning college awareness to students enrolled in success courses.

Success courses also emphasized the importance of student involvement as an investment in their collegiate success. Investment of time and energy becomes an important practice as it relates to college success and post college goal achievement. The next step required action on behalf of each individual student: the action of involvement.

Astin's (1999) Postulate 1 was further implicated in establishing components of success courses, in that once students are acclimated to college, the acclimation process becomes an early expression of involvement. Enrollment in a success course qualifies as the students' first step toward the investment of time and energy, on the path to involvement in the college experience. Astin declared that once students are enrolled in a success course, they must willingly become involved/engaged by becoming participants in activities and assignments offered by the success course. He alluded to actually working and completing assignments as indicative of time and energy exerted. Ultimately, the amount of input, energy, and time spent studying will determine students' outcomes. As students become more involved, more time and energy is invested. According to Postulate 1, the more effective and involved students are, the better the outcomes should be.

However, equipped with only limited knowledge, students frequently struggle with the prospect of how to do everything that needs to be done within a prescribed time frame, how to balance the commodities of time and energy, and how to be aware of how much time to devote to various new encounters. Time management is a major issue for the first-time college student. Success courses provide the avenue for students to become a more effective time manager, which is what Postulate 1 ascribes to do, according to 100% of the web respondents. Components of success courses help students to navigate their time and energy, placing them on the path to completion, which promotes consideration for Postulate 3.

Astin's (1999) Postulate 3 is involvement can be identified quantitatively and qualitatively. In the research, administrators identified both quantitative and qualitative matters when it came to students' success. For example, students need to know how to study, what to study, and how long to study. Likewise, acquainting students with management of qualitative attributes, such as socializing, studying, working, watching television, and other time-demanding activities, was identified. These matters were noted in 83% of the interviews, as if these fundamental concepts were missing upon entering college, which further supported the impetus for success courses.

The quantitative aspect of Astin's (1999) Postulate 3 becomes more apparent when students need to determine how much time to devote to each activity. Therefore, according to the institutions surveyed, 100% included crucial coping resources, such as study skills, critical thinking skills, emotional development, behavioral development, and time management as components of success course curricula. These fundamental skills presented a guideline for the investment of time and energy. Students are introduced to the importance of how to manage their time, how to effectively study, how to select classes, how to behave appropriately, and how to socialize appropriately.

Astin's (1999) Postulate 3 also appears to be significant in that the research findings also disclosed among the institutions surveyed a unanimous agreement to providing a specific amount of contact credit hours for students' time enrolled in success courses. For instance, 67% of the administrators indicated that the institution provided 1 transferable credit for investing time and energy in successfully completing success courses. Moreover, 73% of the web respondents stated that students had to invest additional time outside of class to meet the course requirement.

In supporting the conceptual framework, Research Question 1 was viewed via Astin's (1999) postulates 1 and 3. Astin's theory explains the importance of balancing time and energy as inputs of involvement. These involvement inputs become part of new environmental experiences for students.

Research Question 2: How were the overall designs and the components of the college success courses selected? Findings related to Research Question 2 appear to have some relationship to Astin's theory of environment and his second and third postulates. To better understand the relationship of Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement through environment, Research Question 2 was posed to gather specific environmental data. Environmental inputs involved what data were involved in the design process, who was involved in the design process, and what items were selected to become components of success courses. According to the administrators interviewed, 83% acknowledged observing the success course designs in place at other institutions. In addition, the textbook *On Course* (Downing, 2010) was engaged and customized for 33% of the institutions. Other specific environmental inputs, such as GPA, underprepared numbers, high developmental education enrollments, and lack of time and stress management skills all contributed to the configuration of success courses and components selected. Students' prior knowledge and experiences in the explicit environmental areas, as well as students' social, emotional, and behavioral status are all attributes that also contributed to the design process and component selections.

In regard to the academically underprepared students, according to 100% of the administrators interviewed, a large percentage of first-generation college students lacked knowledge of college culture and were unable to matriculate through the college processes. These students lacked skills to interact with staff, faculty, and the general college environment.

These data from the web survey concurred with findings from the face-to-face interviews. Furthermore, the face-to-face interviews revealed low college entry test scores (42%), students with disabilities (25%), student athletes (25%), and generation 1.5 students (17%), to have been factored into the design and selection of success courses. Consequently, the environmental design of success courses included components such as study skills, time management, and introduction to college services, and understanding personal learning styles as components 92% of the time, according to the web respondents.

Furthermore, the administrator at MJCC shared, “Data trends of students, the caliber of students, and the need for developmental, and the need for tutoring is very high,” which resulted in designing and selecting components that would support students as they navigated a corrective pathway. Correspondingly, the administrator at WCCC shared, “We looked at low retention and success rates, at-risk populations, students placed in developmental education, and part-time adults.” In response to a review of this population of students, the institutions designed and selected components that assisted students in continuous development.

Astin’s (1999) Postulate 2 indicated that involvement in the collegiate experiences occurs on a continuum. The findings of the present study appear to support the design of success courses providing components that allowed students to become knowledgeable of college processes. For example, 83% of those interviewed attested to introducing resources of library services, financial aid, and student affairs departments. With success courses, the more involved students become, the more knowledge students obtain, and the better they are able to navigate their environment. As students mature through participation in success courses, their levels of development increase and they become increasingly aware of the college processes.

Theoretically, as students' levels of development increase, they become increasingly aware of college processes.

Astin's (1999) Postulate 3, claimed that involvement can be identified quantitatively and qualitatively in college experience. The more environmental involvement in the collegiate experiences, the better the chance of changing students' initial idiosyncrasies and the more value is placed on succeeding. For example, the administrator at MJCC stated, "One of the things that the information is showing us is that the more heavily the Academic Skills Center (ASC) is used, the better our retention and the more success and the less our drop rate is."

Involvement can be quantitative and/or qualitative when students are provided tools (the components of success courses) to become successful. For example, quantitative involvement can be observed and measured by the number of students enrolled in success courses. For instance, the web survey finding revealed 33% of the responding institutions made success courses mandatory and 42% had no requirements. However, for qualitative results, the tools or components of the success courses are in place, but ultimately the responsibility rests with students to become involved.

Research Question 3: How and in what way does the college success course(s) maintain quality and viability? Astin's (1999) Postulate 5 claimed that involvement is reflected in the educational effectiveness of any policy or practice related to its capacity to induce student involvement. Postulate 5 appears to support Research Question 3. To affect the quality and viability of success courses, Postulate 5 is the only postulate that relies on the practices and policies of the institution. Quality and viability are not something maintained by students' involvement alone, but also requires input from the institution as a whole. According to Kuh (2008), "Student engagements represent two critical features. The first is student-driven. . . . The

second is institution-driven” (Kuh, 2008, p. 87). Astin asserted that to support and make success courses viable, the institution must be willing to put policies and practices in place.

The research findings revealed several ways institutions support the advancement of success courses. For example, of the administrators interviewed, 100% disclosed a Title III grant as the major source of funding for success courses. Financial support is an important means for maintaining quality and viability of success courses. As this revenue stream dried up, it forced leaders of these institutions to become even more creative in how to fund success courses. For instance, according to the administrators at MJCC and OJCC, their institutions have incorporated the cost of operating success courses into their strategic plans for student success. The administrators at MMCC and TPCC indicated constantly writing new grant requests as they sought new stakeholders and business and community partnerships. At the time of the interview, the WCCC administrator mentioned that the institution provided sufficient funding and support for success courses and success initiatives; funding, the administrator said, was no object. Therefore, sustaining success courses was no problem at WCCC.

Nevertheless, even with these practices and policies, according to 83% of the administrators interviewed, there still is not enough funding allocated for coordination of success courses. For instance, administrators of both TPCC and MJCC cited funding allocation as a major issue affecting quality and maintaining viability, particularly as it related to hiring full-time and dedicated staff. The research findings from the web survey revealed that only 16% of these institutions had staff working 21–40 hours per week with success courses. Moreover, 67% reported having dedicated staff working only 10 hours or less per week with students’ success courses.

Other methods and strategies designed to maintain quality and viability identified by research findings were addressed in Survey Question 18, When is/are the student success course(s) offered at your college? and Survey Question 25, Which of the following modalities are used in your college's success course(s)? The institution administrators' demonstrated willingness to provide practices and policies were observed with the scheduling of success courses for the most impact. Specifically, the web-based survey research finding revealed that 33% of the community colleges offered success courses during the first and second month of fall semester. Success courses were offered before the first week of fall semester in 25% of the responding institutions. Other disclosed scheduling times included (a) before the first week of fall semester, 25%; (b) during the first week of fall semester, 25%; and (c) during first week of spring semester, 25%. An emerging practice was offering success courses simultaneously alongside existing courses, as related by 33% of the community college administrators interviewed. Nevertheless, 58% of the institutions surveyed offered success courses at times other than the options listed above.

In addition to the noted scheduling of success courses, findings from the web-based survey also revealed that institutions supported success courses through scheduling and providing a variety of modalities through which students could access such courses. According to the researcher's findings based on web-based Survey Question 25, success courses were delivered 100% of the time by the traditional face-to-face method. Additionally, the research findings revealed that 75% of the institutions responding to the web survey indicated providing both face-to-face as well as an online success course. Sixty-seven percent of those responding also acknowledged presenting blended success courses.

Once again, Astin's (1999) Postulate 5 is the only postulate not directed exclusively as the students' responsibility, but instead relies on the willingness of the institution to support success courses. In maintaining quality and viability, the findings revealed that assessing courses also performed an essential function. By assessing success courses, administrators are able to determine what works and what does not work. However, this approach requires institutions to have practices and policies in place for assessing students enrolled in success courses. The research findings established that 100% of the institutions whose administrators participated in the web-based survey, along with the administrators interviewed, were assessing success courses yearly. Student satisfaction surveys and faculty satisfaction surveys were the main types of assessments method being utilized, although, only 33% of the administrators interviewed indicated this information was being employed by the institutions to provide information to stakeholders or to use it to improve existing success courses.

Research Question 4: How is the impact of the college success courses evaluated and demonstrated? Astin's (1999) Postulate 4 claimed that output is directly proportional to quality and quantity of involvement. Success courses are demonstrated by outputs. When students are involved in their learning and their development, there should be positive measurement of outputs. When students participate and are showing up for class on time, taking meaningful class notes, being serious in test taking, and balancing their social life with their academic life, those behaviors should lead to successful completers. Astin's outputs are demonstrated by successful college completers, which also is a demonstration of the strength of success courses.

Success courses are further demonstrated and evaluated in terms of (a) increased student retention rates; (b) increased persistence rates; (c) increased GPAs; (d) increased student involvement in civic engagements; and (e) an overall increase in college activities (which comes

with maturation), according to the research findings. Astin's (1999) Postulate 4 is demonstrated in how students are now interacting with their environments and solving problems.

The impact of success course(s) is also being demonstrated by the utilization of collected data to make course improvement and to make all stakeholders aware of outcomes. Institutions are held accountable for providing current output information to all interested parties. For example, 33% of the administrators interviewed expressed that they review assessment data to make improvements to existing success courses. The administrator at MMCC stated, "Assessment information makes the difference as to whether a success course will continue or if it will be scrapped." According to 67% of the administrators interviewed, institutions are slowly gearing up to review data collected and to ascertain how to best demonstrate the impact of informational data collected.

Stufflebeam's (2002) Theory of Course and Program Evaluation

The second consideration for the research conceptual framework is Stufflebeam's (2002) course and program evaluation theory, CIPP. Program evaluations are necessary to establish context, input, processes, and products. Stufflebeam's theory let stakeholders know if the success courses were on target.

Research Question 1: What catalysts are instrumental to implementation of the college success course(s) instituted by the college? Research Question 1 provided the context necessary to aid the reader in understanding the purpose of the research and to identify the components of success courses that foster student success. This objective was first accomplished by providing a contextual description of success courses, as seen through the lens of administrators from various community colleges and through a web survey. Gathering data from the lens of community college administrators spotlighted a narrow context from a personal and

professional perspective. Likewise, the web survey provided a broader perspective of contextual information regarding success courses. Secondly, Research Question 1 garnered relevant information concerning why it was important to establish student success courses.

This qualitative narrative attempts to represent relationships that somewhat appear between the research findings and that of the second component of the conceptual framework, Stufflebeam's (2002) program, and course evaluation theory. This theory is one of the three constructs of the conceptual framework utilized for the analysis of collected data. This theory of program and course evaluation provided a mechanism for introducing the context of the research. In addition, this context attribute appears to have somewhat of a relationship to Research Question 1, given that Stufflebeam and Research Question 1 both sought to present a logical rationale for implementation of courses in this research study, specifically success courses.

In his model of program and or course evaluation, Stufflebeam (2002) introduces CIPP. Each letter represents a unique aspect of course evaluation. The "C" represents course context as well as the purpose and background information necessary for success course design and implementation. The "I" represents environmental inputs, such as the data inputs that were involved in the design process, who was involved in the design process, and why specific departments provided input in the course design and implementation. The first "P" of Stufflebeam's theory represents the processes utilized by success courses to aid students in achievement. The second "P" represents the final products of the course, or what outcomes and initial goals were met.

Stufflebeam Program Evaluation Theory: Context

Five attributes of Stufflebeam's (2002) CIPP context evaluation appear somewhat related to success courses and findings for Research Question 1 and interview questions 1 and 2. The

five attributes that must be satisfied are (a) is there a need; (b) who is the targeted audience; (c) what or how is the time allocated; (d) what are the criteria; and (e) are there adequate resources. The following research findings represent the face-to-face interviews and the web-based survey responses, which appear to provide somewhat of a relationship between Stufflebeam's five attributes of context evaluation.

Administrator interviews. Stufflebeam's (2002) context evaluation of need appears to relate to Research Question 1 and Interview Question 1. When administrators were asked about the impetus for implementing success courses, the majority of the administrators interviewed identified four significant needs for establishing success courses. These needs included (a) to help increase students' persistence and success rates, (b) to provide information to assist students in becoming acclimated to college, (c) to academically assist the large number of incoming developmental education students, and (d) to implement a Title III grant.

Stufflebeam (2002) also pointed out that in context evaluation, the targeted audience must be identified. The research findings revealed there was an 83% agreement rate among the administrators interviewed regarding the target population for success course enrollments. For instance, the main populations were first-time first-semester students with low placement test scores. The research findings further identified that only 16% of the administrators mentioned establishing success courses for part-time and non-traditional students. This finding was also true in regard to ethnic minority and students without high school diplomas.

Stufflebeam's (2002) context evaluation calls for the evaluation of time allotment. Time allotment becomes an essential attribute that affects budgets and students' time to completion. The research finding revealed a variety of times allotted for success courses. For instance, the majority of administrators interviewed, approximately 83%, required success courses to be

completed within the first semester of school. A smaller percentage of the community colleges that participated in this study allowed students to take a success course any time before graduation. Additionally, in terms of Stufflebeam's context evaluation of time allocation, the research findings identified institutions scheduling success courses at a variety of times. Times varied between morning, afternoon, and evenings from one institution to the next to better accommodate students' needs.

Stufflebeam's (2002) CIPP also referenced criteria institutions used as an important context evaluation component for success courses. The research findings identified limited consistencies among the administrators interviewed regarding organized and agreed upon criteria. For instance, the research findings revealed that the majority of community colleges use COMPASS scores for automatic placement into success courses. Likewise, the administrators revealed when scoring placed students in one or more developmental education classes, it was common to enroll those students in a success course as well. The interviews revealed more inconsistencies in criteria. For example, there were inconsistencies in requirements for enrolling students, for when and if repeating success courses was necessary, the number of credits earned, and the type and numbers of credit hours earned for success courses.

In addition, Stufflebeam's (2002) context evaluation also referred the evaluation of financial resources, human resources, and other means to sustain success courses prior to their being implemented. This reference also appeared to have somewhat of a relationship to Research Question 1: the initial funding for success courses was a Title III grant. After Title III grant funding ended, according to the research findings, institutions pursued other funding sources. For example, institutions combined funding from other grants, sought and wrote new grants, and made the success courses part of the strategic plan for student success. The face-to-face

interview as well as the web survey appears to somewhat substantiate Stufflebeam's (2002) adequate resources attribute.

Furthermore, with regard to human resources, the research findings from interviews and web-based surveys revealed success courses did not have any full-time instructors. For example, success courses were predominantly taught by adjunct professors from a variety of disciplines, counselors, advisors, administrators, and other subject matter experts from the community. Additionally, there was no set training required for teaching a success course. Findings from the face-to-face interviews and the web-based survey coincided in terms of human and financial resources.

Web-based survey responses. In addition to the interviews, the research findings originating from the web-based survey respondents offered insight into what appears to be somewhat of a relationship between Stufflebeam's (2002) context evaluation and Research Question 1. For example, Stufflebeam's targeted audience and the responses from the web-based survey unanimously confirmed the impetus for success courses was to assist first-time full-time students, particularly those students with low placement scores. Moreover, according to the research findings of the web-based survey, only a small percentage of institutions that had implemented success courses identified returning students, non-traditional students, and generation 1.5 students as target populations. Likewise, an even smaller percentage (8%) identified part-time students or ethnic minorities as being the target population for implementation of success courses.

There appears to be somewhat of a relationship with Stufflebeam's (2002) criteria and the web-based survey research findings with regard to criteria. There was, for the most part, also congruence between findings of the interviews, with a few added varying criteria. For instances,

success courses were scheduled as classes, workshops, weekend retreats, before-semester boot camps, and seminars. According to Stufflebeam's theory, the criteria should meet the need. Likewise, the variations in duration should also meet the need. Consequently, the research findings discovered the duration or time length for success courses varied from 40 minutes to up to one semester in duration. According to the research findings, no standards were revealed as were related to the time duration of success courses. However, the majority of web-based survey respondents did agree that success courses were generally scheduled sometime between the first and second week of fall semester.

Moreover, the web-based survey research findings revealed each institution had a different view when it came to declaring success courses as being discretionary or compulsory. Only a fraction of the institutions surveyed considered success courses to be compulsory; the administrators interviewed also bore out this preference. It was also discovered at the time of the research that approximately 25% of the institutions had not yet implemented regulations/criteria for success courses.

Stufflebeam's (2002) theory of evaluation appears to show a relationship to the findings in the analysis of Research Question 1. In general, CIPP seems to show a strong relationship to the findings from both the interviews and the web-based survey. Context evaluations also appear to aid in understanding the impetus for establishing success courses. Additionally, Stufflebeam's context evaluation appears to provide the foundation to transition into the investigation of the next phase of his evaluation theory, Inputs.

Research Question 2: How were the overall design and the components of the college success course/courses selected? Once the context has been established according to Stufflebeam's (2002) evaluation theory, the next step of CIPP is input. Stufflebeam referred to

input as any item that can (a) evaluate a proposed strategy for responsiveness to needs, (b) acquaint staff with issues, (c) assess for sufficiency the clearly defined courses objectives and relevant content for practical problems, and/or (d) assesses for feasibility and viability. Research Question 2 seems to relate somewhat to Stufflebeam's evaluation inputs. Data collected as input for Research Question 2 also involved (a) Interview Question 3, data involved in the design process; (b) Interview Question 4, individuals involved in the design process; and (c) Interview Question 5, the pertinent components selected for success courses.

Research findings revealed the administrators interviewed and the web-based survey responses to be frequently similar throughout the data collection process. In addition, the research findings appear to somewhat have attributes related to Stufflebeam's (2002) input evaluation theory. For instance, the majority of the administrators interviewed and the survey respondents identified incoming placement scores, high dropout rates, minimal cognition pertaining to college culture, and an overall inability to complete college as being major issues needing attention in designing success courses. As a consequence, concentration was placed on the needs of diversity and caliber of incoming first-time full-time students. This group was targeted and its data input became the population utilized in the designing process for success courses. Correspondingly, both interviews and surveys research findings revealed the mentioned categories as needing attention. For example, students with low COMPASS scores, along with athletes and students with disabilities became target populations providing data input for designing success courses. Moreover, according to the research findings, other input components that seemed to be somewhat related to Stufflebeam's input perspective in collecting of number of students enrolled in success courses were number of students completing a success course,

number of students persisting to the next semester, and the number of college as germane for designing success courses.

Furthermore, when participants were asked who was involved in the design process, the research findings from the administrators interviewed and the web-based survey respondents appear to have somewhat of a relationship to Stufflebeam's (2002) input evaluation. There was a unanimous response among both data sources. The largest input into the design of success courses came from the individuals identified as being the most knowledgeable. For instance, key leaders in the student affairs department and key leaders in the academic affairs department were identified as providing significant input. Other departments providing significant input were the library and the offices of institutional research.

Stufflebeam's (2002) input evaluation theory also takes into account the attributes that are responsive to students' needs or the components of success courses designed to address the students' needs. Likewise, Research Question 2 was also concerned with identifying the overall components of success courses and how those components were selected. Once again, the administrators' interviews and the web-based survey responses concurred. The research findings emphasized that the overall design of components for success courses was selected based on information garnered from first-year full-time student needs. Similarly, Stufflebeam's (2002) CIPP evaluation theory regards responsiveness to needs as a major input contributor. For example, the research findings revealed first-year full-time students were entering community college without the necessary college preparedness and a large percentage of this population was not completing college. Subsequently, an introduction to college services, study skills, time management, and understanding personal learning styles, stress management, setting personal academic goals, knowledge of library and tutor services, test taking, note taking, and technology

were selected as topics that would address students' needs and reduce the barriers to college achievement. Success courses are designed to be modified to fit needs as those needs occur. The findings pointed to the addition of a financial literacy component. Likewise, a career exploration component was needed and added to the success course curriculum. An introduction to the use of technology was also added as a component of success courses.

Research Question 2 evaluated input data collected to provide an overview of all the design components of success courses. Subsequently, the input data involved three key factors: (a) information and data involved in the design process, (b) who and what institutional departments provided input and involvement in the design process, and (c) why and what input was involved in ultimately selecting success course components. The overall design process appears to show somewhat of a relationship to Stufflebeam's (2002) CIPP evaluation theory component of input.

Research Question 3: How and in what ways do the college success courses maintain quality and viability? As in any course, quality and viability of success courses are important attributes for accountability to students, parents, and all other stakeholders. Therefore, to ascertain quality and viability, processes should be in place to address the perceived worth of success courses. Maintaining quality and viability is not only important for accountability, but also for current planning, correction, and future direction. Maintaining quality and viability also parallels Stufflebeam's (2002) CIPP theory's third attribute, process evaluation.

Stufflebeam's (2002) process evaluation theory represents an attempt to provide the lens through which to monitor, assess daily, and assess the overall course. Process evaluation information can be used to provide corrective feedback, report to stakeholders, and seek funding

for success courses. Process evaluation is also known to identify current processes that could assist administrators to maintain quality and viability.

Stufflebeam's (2002) process evaluation theory appears to have somewhat of a relationship to Research Question 3 findings because of the need to acquire data to maintain quality and viability. In this study, to identify the component of first-year first-semester college success courses specifically designed to foster student success, process evaluations research findings concentrated on three interview questions. These questions included Interview Question 6, how often success courses were assessed; Interview Question 7, what methods were used for assessing success courses; and Interview Question 8, who and what college departments were involved in assessing success courses. Stufflebeam's process evaluation theory suggests that assessments require cooperation from students enrolled and faculty teaching success courses. When asked how often success courses are assessed, the research findings from the administrators interviewed corresponded to the web-based survey responses and revealed institutions customarily assessed success courses annually and sometimes more frequently. For instance, the majority of the institutions not only assessed success courses yearly, but also acknowledged assessing success courses following each semester. Likewise, a large percentage of both interviewees and survey responses indicated assessing success courses following each topic/component presented, in addition to at the end of the semester. Conversely, at the time of the research, the findings further revealed that more than half of both the administrators interviewed and those surveyed expressed that assessment information was being collected. However, the data were not yet being used to make changes in the success courses of those community colleges. This revelation appears to somewhat contradict Stufflebeam's purpose for process evaluation, which is to monitor, assess, correct, and report.

When asked what methods of assessments were being used by institutions, the research findings from the face-to-face interviews and web-based survey responses once again mirrored one another. A plethora of assessments had been implemented and utilized. The research findings identified summative and formative evaluation methods used throughout the institutions. Summative assessments were concerned with assuring quality and validity of the day-to-day activities of the success course, and formative assessments were concerned with cumulative, end-of-the-year data and its impact on success courses. For example, the research findings identified pre- and post-course students' satisfaction surveys, anecdotal notes, faculty surveys, and daily quizzes as forms of summative assessment of success courses.

Additionally, the research findings identified approximately 50% of the institutions reported tracking students' daily use of academic skills/tutorial centers to ensure quality and viability. Consequently, some academic skills center data confirmed an increase in retention rates for those students utilizing the skills centers. Those daily assessments appear to have somewhat of a relationship to Stufflebeam's (2002) suggested process evaluation for maintaining quality and viability. Providing immediate feedback on how satisfied students were, in some cases, alerted instructors to what the students had learned from success course sessions.

Furthermore, the institutions surveyed and administrators interviewed collectively acknowledged requiring more formative assessments. Stufflebeam's (2002) process evaluation theory utilizes formative feedback also to strengthen and maintain quality and viability of success courses. For instance, the research findings identified utilization of COMPASS test scores by the majority of the institutions as a more formal method of process evaluation. COMPASS scores provide baseline data for total required enrollments and those attempting success courses. Likewise, according to research findings, more than 50% of the administrators

and web-based survey respondents reported collecting the number of students attempting success courses annually. Those data are then compared to the number of students completing success courses, which provides feedback for course planning and reporting.

Moreover, Stufflebeam's (2002) process evaluation theory seemed to have somewhat of a relationship to the research findings, which revealed more than 50% of the community colleges surveyed utilized Downing's (2010) *On Course* academic pathway unit reviews as a more formalized process for assessing success courses for quality and viability. Likewise, the research findings also identified other formal assessments, such as career aptitude, personality, individual learning styles, reflective journal writing, and written final exams, all understood to be assessment methods comparable to Stufflebeam's (2002) process evaluation and used to show quality and viability of success courses.

To establish who was involved and what departments were involved in the assessment process of success courses, data were collected regarding students, faculty, and staff. Once again, the administrators' interviews mirrored the web-based survey responses. Stufflebeam's (2002) process evaluation appeared to relate somewhat in terms of his suggestion regarding the individuals and departments involved in the assessment or process evaluations. For example, the research finding revealed 100% of the students enrolled in success courses, along with faculty and staff, were continuously invited to participate in the assessment process. Likewise, the findings revealed that the majority of the institutions had curriculum and instruction committee representation involved in the assessment process of success courses.

Furthermore, the research findings indicated other departments of the institutions were involved in the assessment process of success courses. For instance, the student affairs department was the department most commonly included, followed by the math department,

language arts department, career development, and other undisclosed departments. A small percentage of the institutions reported having a data ranger who not only tracked enrollments and course completions, but also developed and analyzed faculty and student surveys as part of maintaining quality and viability of success courses.

Success course assessment teams were found to frequently be composed of members or individuals representing vice presidents (academic and student affairs), academic deans, and institutional research groups or departments. Finally, in terms of maintaining quality and viability, Stufflebeam's (2002) process evaluation, including monitoring, assessing, correcting, and reporting, appears to be helpful. However, to sustain quality and viability, all departments in the college must be involved in the process.

Research Question 4: How is the impact of the college success course(s) evaluated and demonstrated? The second "*P*" of Stufflebeam's (2002) CIPP theory represents product evaluation. Product evaluation represents the final impact, effectiveness, sustainability, and transferability of success courses. CIPP theory of product evaluation seems to show somewhat of a relationship with the findings of Research Question 4. Both attempt to demonstrate-final outcomes. The data collected from Research Question 4 center around (a) Interview Question 9, what metrics are used to demonstrate the success of success courses; (b) Interview Question 10, what changes have been made over the past few years in current success courses; and (c) Interview Question 11, based on lessons learned, what are some best practices observed.

Stufflebeam's (2002) product evaluation typically involves metrics such as final grades, overall student experience, overall faculty experience, and retention to the next semester. The research findings from the administrators interviewed and the web-based survey respondents revealed common factors or metrics used to demonstrate effectiveness of success courses. For

example, the research findings overwhelmingly identified first-time first-year students' retention and persistence to demonstrate the impact of success courses. Therefore, retention from first semester to second semester, from first year to second year, and ultimately to college completion was revealed as data that were constantly used by colleges to demonstrate the successfulness of success courses. Additionally, students' satisfaction with the content of success courses was demonstrative of success. Likewise, grades, class participation, future course participation and completion, and completion of intended credentials all appear to somewhat relate to Stufflebeam's product evaluation. Product evaluation ultimately demonstrates the merits and impact of success courses by means of daily, semester, and yearly assessment of quality and viability.

Furthermore, Stufflebeam's (2002) product evaluation appears to somewhat show a relationship in regard to the overall changes in success courses within the past few years as a metric for demonstrating success courses because output is based on the input and processes of finishing college. The research findings identified each institution as providing its own unique modification for demonstrating success courses. For example, consistent changes were made based on feedback received from faculty and students' satisfaction surveys and the reports of attendance. Moreover, the research findings also revealed 50% of the institutions disclosed having some degree of commonality regarding changes in advising efforts. For the most part, according to the research findings, institutions increased advising efforts as a product evaluation change. As another demonstration of the changes in success courses, institutions are requiring students enrolled in success courses to create educational goals for success before completing other courses. Likewise, a large percentage of the institutions are now requiring the use of

technology and utilizing career coaches as a demonstration of the impact of addressing students' needs relating to success courses.

Consequently, Stufflebeam's (2002) product evaluation seems to somewhat correlate to the research findings inasmuch as product evaluations become the impetus for making changes based on course assessment data. More common changes within success courses have occurred within the past few years, as emphasized by the face-two-face interviews and web-based survey respondents' findings. Examples include (a) an increase in the number of success courses offered, (b) the addition of a cultural literacy component, (c) the addition of a financial literacy component, d) the addition of online success courses, and e) the establishment of required success course enrollment for all students enrolled in a developmental education course. These components have become best practices, according to the findings of the present study. Additional best practices include career coaches, student planners, increased use of technology, advising for part-time students, and expanded training in Downing's (2010) *On Course*.

When success courses are viewed through the lens of Stufflebeam's (2002) CIPP evaluation theory, there appears to be a framework for a more in-depth look at the research findings and the basis for a more accountable system. CIPP provides the mechanism to monitor, collect, and review decision-making data. The theory allows for input from all stakeholders while providing the latitude to make difficult evidence-based decisions to achieve reasonable expectations and outcomes.

Center for Community College Student Engagement

CCCSE (2012) advocated that there are seven fundamental principles proven to support students to college completion: (a) a strong start; (b) a clear, coherent pathway; (c) integrated support; (d) high expectations and high support; (e) intensive student engagement; (f) design

scale; and (g) professional development. The research finding revealed that only six of the seven principles (strong start, clear pathway, integrated support, intensive student engagement, design scale, and professional development) appear to present somewhat of a relationship to the four research questions. These principles advocate for support services to assist entering college students in goal achievement. The research findings further revealed that these seven principles do not always appear clear-cut; they may be somewhat intermingled and dispersed throughout the four research questions. Consequently, analysis of the research findings focused on the relationship that seems to exist between the four research questions, the interview questions, web-based survey responses, and CCCSE because they contribute to the overall purpose of the research: to identify the components of first-year first-semester college success courses specifically designed to foster student success.

Research Question 1: What catalyst is instrumental to the implementation of the college success course instituted by the college? CCCSE (2012) principles 1 and 2, a strong start and a clear, coherent pathway, respectively, appear to have somewhat a relationship to the findings of Research Question 1. CCCSE principles 1 and 2 attempt to set the context for students in need of support services to complete college. Similarly, Research Question 1 also presents the context for success courses as they relate to the needs of first-time first-semester students' endeavors to achieve their college goals. Data were collected from interviews with administrators and a web-based survey. The following information was ascertained from the research findings.

Administrators interviewed. The administrator interviews focused on two interview questions: (a) describe the college success courses at the institution and (b) what are the primary catalysts for establishing a college success course. Responses from administrators to Interview

Question 1 revealed unanimous agreement: to retain and assist students to persist to the next semester and ultimately to become college completers. CCCSE (2012) was somewhat similar, asserting Principle 1, a strong start, as being a crucial component in becoming college completers. According to CCCSE, a strong start requires early connections with administrators, faculty, and staff. For example, of the administrators interviewed, the research findings revealed the majority of the institutions generally made contact with students within the first and second months of fall semester. Additionally, several institutions made contact with students prior to entering college, typically during the junior and/or senior year of high school. Some institutions made contact with prospective students, introducing components of success courses as early as eighth grade. Introducing students to success courses early provides early exposure to college culture. Ideally, the more frequently, and earlier the exposure, the better off students will be when entering college.

Success courses not only assist in developing a strong start through making first connections, which helps students to feel welcome and reduces students' anxieties and intimidation factors surrounding first-time college experiences. The research finding also revealed Research Question 1 seems to somewhat relate to CCCSE (2012) Principle 2, clear and coherent pathways. CCCSE suggested helping students to set logical, clear steps toward goals. Assisting students demonstrates support that aids students in staying on track and reduces unnecessary barriers. For instance, the findings revealed the majority of administrators interviewed identified barriers such as (a) advising, particularly in class scheduling; (b) location of student affairs department and what support offered; (c) location of academic affairs department and support provided; (d) where to find the financial aid office and the assistance

provided; and (e) how to manage home, study, and work. These barriers are usually addressed as components of success courses, therefore aiding in creating a clear and coherent pathway.

In addition, success courses seem to further show somewhat of a relationship to CCCSE (2012) principles 1 and 2 in the descriptions of success courses provided by administrators interviewed. For example, when administrators interviewed were asked to describe the success courses offered at their institution, the collective descriptions either directly identified or made indirect references to CCCSE principles 1 and 2. For example, the findings indicated the majority of the administrators interviewed described success courses as designed to present students with a structured approach to obtaining crucial information and to build early connections with administrators, faculty, and staff to support students' goals of college completion. This description of success courses somewhat represents the CCCSE notion of a strong start and clear pathway. Other examples of how Research Question 1 and parallels CCCSE principles 1 and 2 is the utilization of Downing's (2010) *On Course* to assist in shaping students' behavior, emotions, and clarification of developmental issues, all fundamental components in the development of a clear and coherent pathway.

Web-based survey. There appears to be somewhat of a relationship between CCCSE (2012) and Research Question 1, based on concurrence between the web-based survey responses and the responses of the face-to-face interviews. For example, the web-based survey findings revealed that success courses were scheduled sometime during the first and second month of the students' first semesters of college, which was in keeping answers provided by the administrators interviewed. In addition, the web-based survey respondents revealed that a fraction of the institutions scheduled success courses prior to the start of the fall semester to make the earliest possible contact with first-time full-time students.

Another example of the web-based survey findings and the administrators interviewed appearing to have somewhat of a relationship with CCCSE (2012) is how success courses appear to parallel CCCSE (2012) principles 1 and 2 of a strong start and clear, coherent pathway. The web-based survey respondents indicated that success courses should present topic components such as college preparatory components, navigating business and academic offices, study skills, stress management, note-taking skills, test-taking skills, and time management skills to assist students in their college journeys to completion, findings that reflect the principles of CCCSE.

The research findings indicated both Research Question 1 and CCCSE (2012) principles 1 and 2 identified components that address needs to put students on track for a strong finish. CCCSE and Research Question 1 appear to share the need for accommodating students through academics, early connection with the appropriate departments and appropriate individuals who can find ways to help, and clarifying directions or pathways to make college completion a clear and logical journey. The CCCSE principles of a strong start and a clear and coherent pathway appear to have somewhat of a relationship with Research Question 1. Success courses and CCCSE seem to demonstrate an understanding that providing solutions to barriers often can mean the difference between a student dropping out of college or staying through college completion.

Research Question 2: How were the overall design and the components of the college success courses selected? CCCSE (2012) principles 3 and 5 seem to somewhat have a relationship with Research Question 2 in that both CCCSE and Research Question 2 promote active participation in support services by students. CCCSE Principle 3 encourages integrated support that accommodates students' needs immediately and in context of the learning

experience. Principle 5 encourages intensive student engagement, which speaks to students' participation in the services promoting success.

The research findings based on administrators interviewed and the web-based survey responses were consistent relative to Research Question 2. Research Question 2 offered insights into three interview questions. These included Interview Question 3, the information, or data that were involved in the design of the success courses; Interview Question 4, who was involved in the design of success courses; and Interview Question 5, what exactly are the components of modules of the college success course.

According to the research findings, the majority of the institutions reported having support services available for students enrolled in success courses. However, the findings further revealed a large number of the support services offered by success courses were neither immediate nor in context with learning experiences. Students typically had to wait for specific times of the day and certain locations to access support services. For example, findings from the web-based survey and administrators' interviewed indicated the majority of institutions participating in this study provided support services in an academic skills center. Students were referred to academic centers for support services such as academic tutoring, career development, career coaching, completion of computerized behavioral development modules, and completion of computerized emotional development modules. At their respective institutions, academic skills centers were generally located in libraries, and the support offered was frequently computer-based learning. Academic skills centers were usually accessed after class and were utilized by students at will. Therefore, support services were usually not immediately available and in context of the learning experience. For example, at most institutions, success courses were found to not be mandated, except for specific students such as athletes and those students

enrolled in developmental education classes. The research findings revealed a small number of institutions that mandated students' enrollment into success courses also mandated those students to use the academic skills centers for a certain number of hours each week. This requirement was discovered according to the administrators interviewed and the web-based survey respondents.

A fraction of the administrators and survey respondents disclosed having established ongoing tutoring as a component of success courses. This tutoring can take place during class or immediately after class, when and where the assistance is needed and in context with the learning experience. The assistance is localized and occurs in the same classroom where the assistance is needed. As a consequence, immediate support in context becomes part of the overall learning experience and the design process of success courses at these institutions.

Another example of not having immediate access to the support services involved advising and counseling. According to the research findings, both the web-based survey responses and the administrators interviewed indicated that the majority of institutions were underfunded and understaffed, which caused a deficiency affecting the advising and counseling component of success courses. Likewise, other components of success courses revealed as somewhat similar to CCCSE (2012) Principle 3 included financial emergency and time management skills.

Whereas, CCCSE (2012) Principle 3 addresses services being immediate and in context; Principle 5 speaks to the need for students' active participation in their college success. The overall design of success courses revealed somewhat of a relationship to CCCSE Principle 5 in terms of how students follow through when referred to support services. Although students were referred to academic skill centers, it was ultimately up to the students to participate in the services offered. Students could choose to participate or not. Students' participation becomes an

active act of engaging in the learning experience. CCCSE principles suggest that students in need of support should receive help immediately and at the time learning is taking place, preferably during class when the need for assistance arises and students are actively engaged in doing whatever is required to become college completers.

There are commonalities between Research Question 2 and CCCSE (2012) principles 3 and 5; however, the research findings also revealed some issues were only moderately similar. CCCSE did not elaborate on the importance of who was involved in the design process or what was included in the design process. Nevertheless, the primary goal of CCCSE appears to be making sure components are accessible and are accessed in a timely manner for students' actual participation in the support services. Likewise, success courses also attempt to deliver relevant support services in a timely manner. Therefore, the research does seem to show somewhat of a relationship between success courses and CCCSE principles 3 and 5.

Research Question 3: How and in what ways do the college success courses maintain quality and viability? CCCSE (2012) Principle 6, design scale, and Principle 7, professional development, seem to demonstrate somewhat of an indirect relationship with Research Question 3, in that they position funding and commitment as a focus of maintaining quality and viability of success courses. The target of Research Question 3 is three interview questions: Interview Question 6, how often are success course assessed; Interview Question 7, what methods are used for assessments; and Interview Question 8, who is involved in the assessment process? CCCSE Principle 6, design scale, seems to suggest that institutions need to make a commitment of time and funds for the duration of success course initiatives to maintain quality and viability. Although Research Question 3 addresses assessments, assessment cannot take place without involvement from administration, faculty, and staff. In addition, assessments

cannot be conducted without funding and commitment, which renders design scale as having somewhat of a relationship with student success courses.

CCCSE (2012) design scale speaks to the commitment of time from administrators, faculty, and staff. Design scale also takes into account institution leaders' commitment of funding for the duration of a success initiative. According to the administrators interviewed and the concurring web-based survey findings, community colleges seemed to be somewhat liberal when time and funds are equated to scheduling success courses. For example, findings of administrators interviewed and survey responses coincided in terms of the initial funding for success courses being Title III grants. During the grant period, the majority of the institutions appeared somewhat committed to providing time and funding for success courses. Furthermore, when grant funds were exhausted, other means of support were pursued. Nevertheless, with limited funding, the institutions continued to provide facilities for workshops, access to the academic skills center, and other support services beyond the grant period, as a part of maintaining quality and viability and CCCSE Principle 6 (design scales).

The research findings further revealed that success courses were scheduled at a variety of times and had a demonstrated a number of approaches. For instance, the majority of the institutions scheduled success courses in the traditional face-to-face setting, morning, and early evening sessions. Likewise, a large segment also offered blended session, online and traditional courses together.

CCCSE (2012) Principle 7, professional development, also appears to have somewhat of a relationship to Research Question 3. When referring to individuals involved in providing success courses, according to CCCSE, "Improving students' success rates and meeting college completion goals require individuals not only to re-conceptualize their roles but also to work

differently” (p. 8). Working differently also requires an investment of time and funding from institutions. If administrators, faculty, and staff are required to become more involved with students in success courses, and at levels different from those of traditional college involvements, then institutions will need to invest time and financial resources to allow staff and instructors to attend trainings.

According to the research findings, professional development appeared somewhat a part of success courses; however, to what extent was somewhat ambiguous. For example, the research findings from both the administrators interviewed and the web-based survey responses indicated that the majority of instructors of success courses had no training or professional development to engage the caliber of students entering success courses. Furthermore, only a small fraction of the institutions required training of their administrators, faculty, and staff involved in the operational process of success courses. The research findings further indicated that the major direct professional development of success courses for administrators, faculty, and staff was Downing’s (2010) *On Course* training system. A smaller number of the institutions participated in this costly professional development process, which presented a fundamental understanding of the needs of success courses and strategies to help in shaping behaviors, emotions, and student involvement. Therefore, according to CCCSE (2012) Principle 7, professional development does appear to be somewhat of a factor in maintaining quality and viability of success courses.

Research Question 4: How is the impact of the college success course evaluated and demonstrated? Research Question 4 represents an attempt to understand how success courses evaluate and demonstrate their impact utilizing the CCCSE (2012) seven principles as the framework for the analysis. To ascertain how the impact of college success courses are evaluated

and demonstrated, the research explored three interview questions. These included Interview Question 9, what metrics or means are used by the college to demonstrate success courses; Interview Question 10, over the last few years, what changes have been made as a result of these findings; and Interview Question 11, what are lesson learned or best practices? However, there appears to be no relationship between the CCCSE seven principles for students' success and interview questions 9, 10, and 11; although it can be assumed that CCCSE is concerned with the impact of student success and how to best demonstrate the merits of student success. The seven key principles advocating student success did not seem to address how these principles were demonstrated and the impact on student success.

At the time of the interview, the majority of the institutions had just started to collect data for review, although a fraction of the institutions acknowledged unofficially utilizing findings to make changes. These changes included (a) increased advising, (b) added financial literacy components, (c) increased career development skills, (d) increased assistance with critical thinking skills, and (e) increased civic involvement components. The seven principles of CCCSE (2012) did not speak to any changes or best practices resulting from these findings.

In conclusion, the four research questions, for the most part, did appear to show somewhat of a relationship with the CCCSE (2012) seven principles of student success. They fundamentally have a similar purpose, to aid students in becoming college completers, although becoming college completers will take a commitment from the college as well as a commitment from students to become involved in the process of success.

Emerging Themes

This study addressed four research questions:

1. What catalysts are instrumental to the implementation of the college success course(s) instituted by the college?
2. How are the overall design and components of the college success course(s) selected?
3. How and in what ways do the college success courses maintain quality and viability?
4. How is the impact of the college success course(s) evaluated and demonstrated?

These questions assisted in establishing what six face-to-face interviews and various responses from a web-based survey of single-campus community colleges identified as components of success courses designed to foster student success. Eleven specific interview questions and 27 web-based survey questions were asked of the participants and were customized to complement each research question.

Various emerging themes were identified from the administrators interviewed and the web-based survey respondents. Figure 27 represents the discovery of four emerging themes from the research findings. In a subsequent review and analysis of data collected from the administrators' interviews and from the web-based survey responses to the four research questions, the following emerging themes became apparent, as indicated in Figure 27:

- non-dedicated first-year first-semester students success courses;
- lack of standards or regulations;
- no required training or professional development; and
- the use of Downing's (2010) *On Course*.

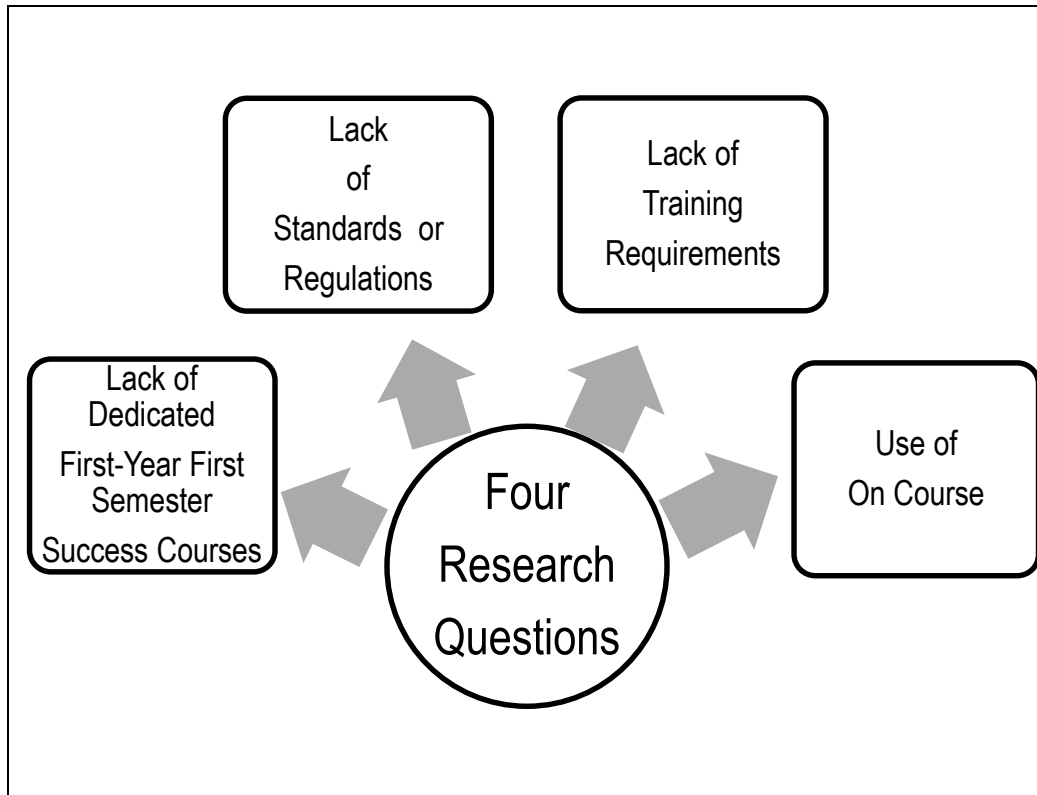


Figure 27. Discovery of the emerging themes

The first emerging theme was that not all community colleges had a dedicated first-year first-semester success course. Administrators' interview responses ranged from, "We do not have what would be called a success course" to, "We do not have success courses, but we have what is called success initiatives." Another administrator interviewed indicated the community college had good retention numbers and therefore had no need for success courses. Although research findings unanimously exposed the need for and the positive benefits of success courses, there remained institutions that did not offer success courses. These institutions neither offered nor required first-year first-semester students to enroll in any type of success courses when and if they were offered.

A second emerging theme was that there were few to no set standards or regulations for success courses. The only one standard frequently set by most institutions was utilization of low

COMPASS scores for placing students into a success course. However, for the most part, there were no other standards. Other areas that lacked regularity included the scheduling of success courses. The majority of administrators participating in the interviews acknowledged scheduling success courses at various times in the semester, before fall semester, during the first or second month of fall semester, occasionally during spring semester, or not scheduled at all. Existing research indicates the best time to schedule success courses is as early as possible during the first-semester. Another aspect of this emerging theme was the allocation of time for success courses: there was no set amount of time dedicated for students enrolled in success courses. The duration of success courses, when they were available and offered or required, could be anywhere from a 2-hour time slot to an entire semester. Completion of the success course could also earn 1 credit hour or no transferable credit. There were no explanations given for the wide gap in the duration of time; however, the administrators interviewed discussed the need to provide transferable credit because of the time students were involved in success courses.

A third emerging theme was that there were no requirements for professional development or training of instructors who taught student success courses. The administrators, faculty, staff, and others involved in success courses were not required to have any type of certificate or training to teach or facilitate a success course. Oddly, instructing success courses was assigned to whoever was available: administrators, faculty, staff, and others. In some instances, success courses were taught by community members with no credentials. However, they were considered content experts. According to the research, training and professional development is an essential element in maintaining quality and viability of success courses. The majority of institutions did not require any specific training or professional development for those facilitating success courses.

The fourth emerging theme was the utilization of Downing's (2010) *On Course*. This textbook was used for the development of success course curricula or as the curriculum itself. Interestingly, the textbook appeared as the most frequently used text cited by interviewed administrators and web-based survey respondents. *On Course* was not only referred to for curriculum development, but also for individual customization curriculum design by institutions. Administrators reported *On Course* was used because of its overall content design, self-motivation component, student behavior development component, emotional behavior component, and embedded reflection and evaluation components. Therefore, *On Course* was used not only because it presented a variety of success course components, but also because it evaluated and demonstrated the effectiveness of success courses simultaneously through students' actions and behaviors. *On Course* was common among the administrators interviewed as well as the web-based survey responses. In addition, as a best practice, a small percentage of the institutions in the research have begun to utilize *On Course* as a professional development component for administrators, faculty, staff, and others interested in becoming involved in success courses. Table 22 summarizes the emerging themes resulting from the research questions.

Table 22. Emerging Themes and Emerging Theme Descriptions

Emerging themes	Descriptions
None dedicated first-year first-semester success course(s).	Exposed the fact that all institutions do not have success courses and why.
Lack of standards and or regulations.	Contains common inconsistencies in the design of success courses.
No required training or professional development.	Contains possible challenges in maintaining quality and viability.
Use of <i>On Course</i>	Presents the utilization of a common textbook.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 consisted of data analysis and findings of the research. Data analysis and findings were organized into four sections: (a) face-to-face interviews; (b) a web-based survey; (c) documents and artifacts; and (d) observational notes. The web-based survey utilized for the research was conducted using Google Surveys. The online survey was organized in two segments to capture demographic information and programmatic information. The web-based survey was used to capture information to support development of questions posed in face-to-face interviews. The information derived from the web-based survey was also used to determine which administrators to approach for the face-to-face interviews portion of the research. The survey also gathered significant information concerning individual colleges and the demographics of their student populations.

After the web-based survey analysis was completed, administrators from six Illinois community colleges were chosen to participate in the face-to-face interviews. Each participant was carefully chosen based on a set of specified criteria, which allowed for maximum variation. The informational data collected from each interview were analyzed and special attention was given to avoid any perception of bias. Four emerging themes were derived from the data analysis process through the use of 11 interview questions. Each of the interview questions was matched with the four research questions. Data collected provided insight into the purpose of the research: to identify the components of first-year first-semester college success courses specifically designed to foster student success in single-campus Illinois community colleges.

Documents and other printed artifacts were obtained and analyzed from the six single-campus community colleges to gain further insight into success courses offered by the institutions. Information was collected from the websites of the individual community colleges,

their catalogues, campus libraries, department brochures, and pamphlets. Field note observations were recorded immediately following each face-to-face interview. Factors observed were location of success course administrators' offices, surrounding areas, interior office spaces, location of academic skills centers, and pictures on the wall. These observations were viewed to determine if and how these factors might influence success courses.

For the conceptual framework, two theories were employed: Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement and Stufflebeams's (2002) theory of course and program evaluation. Additionally, one set of principles, The CCSSE (2012) seven principles for student success, were incorporated into the conceptual framework. Both the two theories and the seven principles were represented as segments of the conceptual framework used to analyze the data collected. After data analysis was completed using the conceptual framework, nine *a priori* themes were identified: (a) students academically underprepared for college work, (b) lack of knowledge of college culture, (c) increased enrollments, (d) baseline assessments, (e) ongoing assessments, (f) student development, (g) early introduction to college policies, (g) goals clarification, and (i) institutional commitment.

Chapter 5 offers a discussion of the research findings and conclusions relating to the identification of components of success courses that foster student success. The discussion is followed by conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research and practices.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research was conducted to identify the components of first-year first semester college success courses specifically designed to foster student success in single-campus community colleges. The qualitative research approach utilized a web-based survey, semi-structured face-to-face interviews, field notes, and documents to allow for triangulation of findings from various data sources.

Chapter 5 includes a presentation of the research conclusions that were developed based on discoveries revealed from four research questions. To navigate this study, the following four research questions were posed:

1. What catalysts are instrumental to the implementation of the college success course(s) instituted by the college?
2. How are the overall design and the components of the college success course(s) selected?
3. How and in what way does the college success program maintain quality and viability?
4. How is the impact of the college success course(s) evaluated and demonstrated?

In this chapter, the four research questions are addressed to allow for discussion of implications of the study and recommendations for practice, as well as future research. Finally, the Roland analysis model of success courses is introduced.

Discussion

The issue of student success has haunted administrators since the conceptualization of community colleges. Historically, community colleges were designed to accommodate students

who could not afford and /or did not have the grades to attend 4-year colleges and universities. By design, community colleges are accessible, affordable, and serve the community in which the institutions are located (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Generally speaking, community colleges have an open-door policy; they are not in the habit of rejecting students, regardless of gender, academic preparedness, financial capacity, ability, or social status. Specifically, students who are—by all societal indications—unprepared academically, single parents, first-generation college students, lack knowledge or college protocol, second language learners, and retoolers attend community colleges. Community colleges provide the opportunity for any student to receive a college education.

The nature of students entering college is not the only issue affecting lack of college completion. The larger issue is how to retain students and to help them to persist until completion. The majority of first-time first-semester students enter college with the goal of receiving an associate's degree. However, SENSE (CCCSE, 2010), reported less than half of these entering students achieve that goal. Even more alarming, according to a report from the ICCB (2008), approximately 79% of the entering first-year students did not complete their anticipated college goal of graduation.

Likewise, Roueche (2010) discovered that only 45% of students entering a community college complete after 6 years. Therefore, the remaining 55% join the ranks of non-completers of their college curriculum. Additionally, research shows students typically drop out sometime prior to their second year in college due to perceived barriers. This phenomenon was somewhat confirmed during the data collection phase of the present research.

Not only does the research point out that more than 50% of entering college students are not completing, but also, by not obtaining a degree, these students are in a situation of being

underprepared for the labor market. The number for qualified workers is so low it compelled President Obama (2009) to issue a proclamation calling for a significant increase in college graduates by the year 2020. This increase in college graduates would serve to better prepare students for the 21st-century workforce. As the labor force becomes more and more technical, it requires better and more highly trained workers. Besides technical training, the research also identified the inability of workers to earn livable wages as an additional problem for college drop-outs.

There is a need for some type of intervention to help retain students and to keep them moving toward their college completion goals. Success course(s) are one of the more promising initiatives. Success courses provide entering students with the first contact to assist them toward achieving the goal of college completion. Success course(s) are vehicles whereby students receive necessary support services to jump-start their college experiences. Given that a large percentage of students enter community colleges underprepared academically, socially, emotionally, and as first-generation students, second language learners, and all lacking the necessary experiences required to become successful, there is a great need for success courses to provide the necessary connections to persist in college. Students enrolled in a success course(s) receive an introduction to the necessary skills to enhance their college experiences. Success course(s) could provide a foundation for not only retention through the first semester, but also provide skills to help student to persist throughout their college and career.

Conclusion

The conclusion to this study identifies how the components of first-year first-semester success courses can foster students' college success and how the four research questions related to the findings discovered through the lens of the conceptual framework.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, “What catalysts and are instrumental to the implementation of the college success course(s) instituted by the college?” Based on the study findings from six single-campus community colleges in Illinois, it can be concluded that the major catalysts for success courses were low COMPASS scores. Success courses were implemented to assist students entering college with low COMPASS scores. It appears this input was related to Astin’s (1999) and Stufflebeam’s (2002) input theory because these researchers agreed that input leads to implementation. Another conclusion is that addressing low COMPASS scores as a catalyst for implementing college success courses was also addressed by the CCCSE integrated support. These integrated support services appeared in the form of students needing assistance with reading, writing, and math skills. However, success courses involve so many other components as catalysts in addition to COMPASS scores. For example, emotional, social, and behavioral components also need to be addressed early in the semester.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, “How are the overall design and the components of the college success course(s) selected?” Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the overall design and component selections of success courses, for the most part, are based on students’ environmental inputs, as suggested by Astin (1999) and Stufflebeam (2002). Although, components were designed to help students, it appears as though there was no data to back up decisions for overall design or a requirement for selecting certain components. Academic skills, note-taking skills, study skills, test-taking skills, and listening skills were all assumed because of low test scores; however it was not clear if the success courses really addressed these needs, or

whether these needs were the reasons for student drop-out. Stufflebeam advocated for some processes to be in place to verify students' productivity.

Furthermore, based on the findings, it can be concluded that scheduling success courses is significant in the overall design. It appears as though institutions are able to schedule success courses when they are deemed appropriate. However, according to CCCSE, integrated support services and accommodations scheduling should be early, immediate, and within the learning context. Without proper data, support services can be inadequate.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, "How and in what way does the college success course(s) maintain quality and viability?" The following conclusion was also determined from the research findings. The majority of the community colleges in the research did not appear to be overly concerned with maintaining quality and/or viability. As such, there appears to be no relationship between the findings and conclusions of Astin (1999) and Stufflebeam (2002), who both pointed to input and processes as having standard rules in place in order to maintain quality and viability. According to the research findings in the present study, the conclusion is that success course assessments were being performed, but the assessments are not yet being analyzed on a regular basis, which makes it difficult to maintain quality and viability.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked, "How is the impact of the college success course(s) evaluated and demonstrated?" When it came to demonstrating the impact of success courses; the findings support the conclusion that the impact of success courses in most institutions was not clearly demonstrated. Astin (1999), Stufflebeam (2002), and CCCSE all suggested the impact of success courses is ultimately demonstrated by students' outcome, the product. However, a small

percentage of the institutions in the present study relied on success course attendance to reflect the impact of success courses. Other institution relied on students' utilization of the academic skills center. Administrators of a few institutions acknowledged not having any way of knowing how to demonstrate the impact of success courses. These findings support the conclusion that a greater percentage of the institutions relied on anecdotal information to demonstrate the impact of success courses. If there are systematic approaches for data collection and analysis; then demonstrating the impact of success courses would not be as vague, the benefits of success courses could be clearly demonstrated, and institutions would be more forthcoming with funding.

Implications and Recommendations

The study viewed the topic of interest, components of success courses, from three different lenses. The first viewpoint was through the lens of Astin's (1999) theory of student involvement, which consists of his IEO model. The second lens was Stufflebeam's (2002) theory of courses evaluations and his CIPP model. The third viewpoint was through the lens of CCCSE (2012) seven key principles for student success. Based upon and according to the research findings driven by the four research questions, the following implications and recommendations are proposed.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, "What catalysts are instrumental to the implementation of the college success courses instituted by the college?"

Implication. Students can be successful in their college experience with the use of appropriate support services and effective scheduling serving as catalysts for implementation.

Recommendations. Community colleges could possibly increase students' completion rates by the following activities:

- Illinois community colleges can be more purposeful in planning and implementation of success courses.
- Requiring all entering first-year students to take a success course.
- Scheduling success courses 2 weeks prior to the beginning of fall and the beginning of spring semesters.
- Offer math and writing remediation as part of the 2 weeks prior to start of the semester.
- Require attendance at all sessions of the success course during the 2-week period prior to the start of the semester.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, “How were the overall design and the components of college success courses selected?”

Implication. Community colleges should be more cognizant of the importance of the process in the overall design of success courses and components selected.

Recommendations. Recommendations based on answers to Research Question 2 are as follows:

- Prior to design and implementation, have adequate funding to support success courses beyond the initial phase. There should be adequate funding for growth and expansion.
- Faculty and staff interacting with success course should be aware of the diverse cultural background of the student population enrolled in success courses.
- Allow students to access the services of the success course as often as needed throughout their college experience.

- Allow the use of technology (e.g., social media platforms) as a design component.

Use technology other than the traditional computer for tutorials.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, “How and in what way do the college success courses maintain quality and viability?”

Implication. The findings of this study have implications for institutions and their utilization of assessments to maintain quality and viability. According to the findings, the majority of community colleges were performing assessments, but they were not utilizing the findings to make changes.

Recommendations. Recommendations based on answers to Research Question 3 are as follows:

- To maintain quality and viability, provide reasons for all assessments.
- The assessment findings should be analyzed immediately for purposeful outcomes.
- Assessment findings should be utilized to make changes and improvements.
- There should be training and professional development for all faculty and staff involved in success courses.
- Students should be made aware of high expectations for success courses.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked, “How is the impact of the college success courses evaluated and demonstrated?”

Implications. Community colleges should find ways to determine the impact of success courses. The impact of success courses should be better demonstrated by students’ outcomes.

Recommendations. Recommendations based on responses to Research Question 4 are as follows:

- A simple and easy way to provide a glimpse into the potential of success courses is through some form of pre- and post-evaluations along with COMPASS.
- Review all assessments immediately to determine student direction, similar to the process of developing an individual education plan for students in success courses. This approach can help in tracking successes and failures.
- Allow students to be assessed in a variety of modalities to demonstrate the extent of impact of success courses.
- Finally, track students as they persist. Student starting out in success courses and reaching the goal of college completion speaks volumes as a demonstration of the impact of success courses.

Recommendations for Dissemination of Findings

These research findings and analysis could be of interest to administrators of community colleges and universities. The research findings may also be applicable to other educational and technical institutions, both public and private, that are considering implementation of success courses to aid in student retention and persistence to completion.

These research findings can be disseminated at conferences, seminars, and high school recruitment opportunities. Likewise, the research can also be submitted for publishing in journals and newsletters. The research can be of value for departments such as student success, developmental education, and special needs at colleges and universities. The hope is that the findings will provide a positive impact on establishing, implementing, and demonstrating success courses in Illinois community colleges and throughout the nation.

Roland Success Course Analysis Model

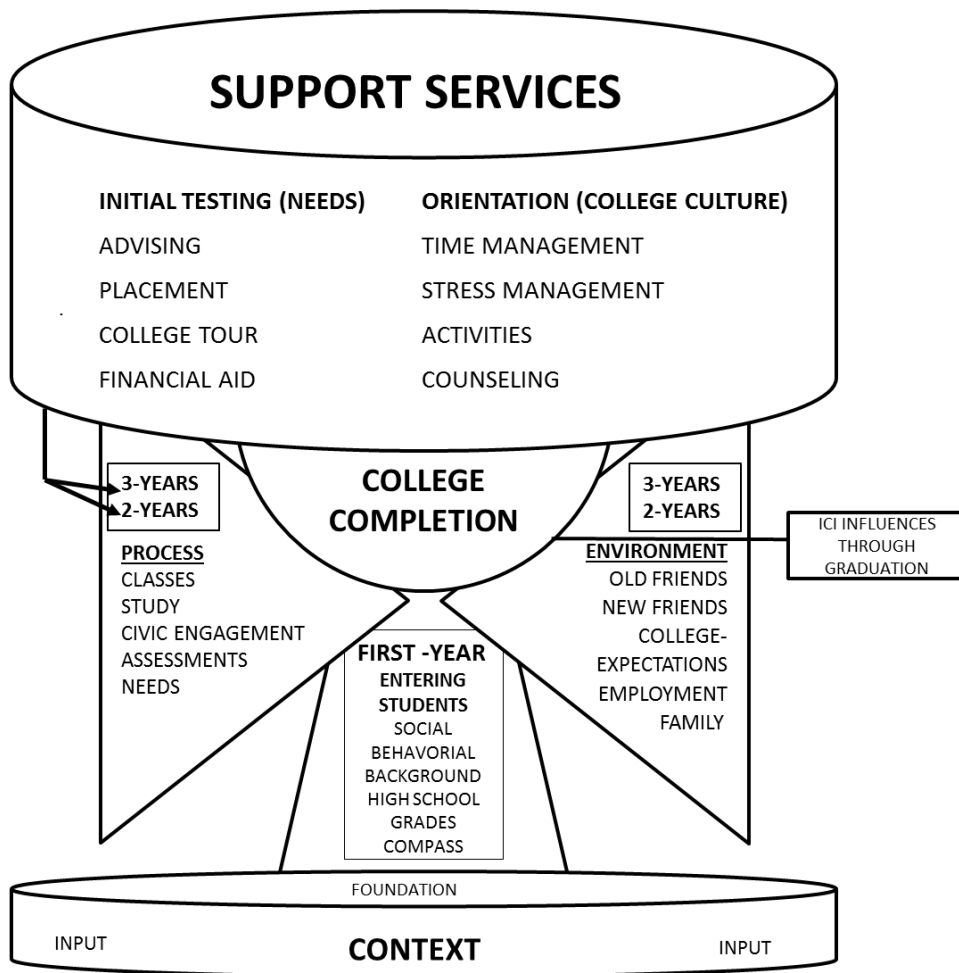


Figure 28. Roland Success Course Analysis Model

Chapter Summary

Twenty-one community colleges in Illinois responded to the online survey. Based on maximum variation from those responses, administrators from six institutions agreed to participate in a face-to-face semi-structured interview. Eleven interview questions were matched to the four research questions, which helped in providing a comprehensive and concise overview

of the research findings. As a consequence of analyzing the data derived from the web-based survey and face-to-face interview sessions, four emerging themes were revealed.

This study concludes by identifying how the components of first-year first-semester success courses can foster students' college success, and how this phenomenon fits within the construct of the conceptual framework. This chapter presented conclusions for the four research questions. After the conclusions and organized according to the four research questions that drove this study, implications and recommendations were presented for present and future practices. Lastly, there was an introduction to the Roland Success Course Analysis Model and a summary.

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Appendix A

Institutional (web based) Survey

Please have the person at your institution responsible for your college success courses to complete this survey.

For this survey, student success courses are defined as first-year courses(s) specifically designed to facilitate an orientation for students, which the college believes will facilitate their retention and academic progress. This might include a variety of activities such as: study skills, institutional information, advising, test taking etc.

Demographic Information

1. Please confirm your consent to participate. If you check reject, you will not be allowed to complete the survey.

Consent
Reject

2. Contact Information

Institution's Name
Participant's Name
Date

3. Gender:

☐ Male
☐ Female

4. Age Group:

☐ Under 40 years
☐ 40 – 44 years
☐ 45 – 49 years
☐ 50 – 54 years
☐ 55 – 59 years

☐ 60 – 64 years

☐ 65 years or older

5. Ethnicity:

☐ Asian or Pacific Islander

☐ American Indian or Alaskan

☐ Black, non-Hispanic

☐ Hispanic

☐ White, non-Hispanic

Other, please specify

6. Education:

☐ Doctorate (Ph.D., Ed.D, etc.)

☐ Master's

Other, please specify

7. What is your current position: Briefly describe your work responsibilities.

Job Title
Responsibilities

8. What was your previous position: Briefly describe your pervious job responsibilities.

Job Title
Responsibilities

9. How long have you been responsible for the college student success course(s)?

☐ 1 year or less

☐ 1 – 3 years

☐ 4 – 6 years

☐ Over 6 years

10. If you have other responsibilities, how many hours a week do you dedicate to student success course(s)?

☐ 31 – 40 hours per week

☐ 21 - 30 hours per week

☐ 11- 20 hours per week

☐ 10 hours or less per week

11. For staff working with the success course(s), what special training or professional development activities have they attended, or are required to attend in order to work with the student success course(s) at your college?

Program information

12. What is the title of your institution's student success course(s)?

13. Briefly explain the activities of your student success course(s)?

14. Is the first-year student success course(s) mandatory?

☐ Yes

☐ No

15. If the student stops-out or drops-out, must they retake the success course(s) to reenroll?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

16. Explain circumstances when the student must retake the program:

--

17. Who are the students for which success courses were designed?

Mark all that apply

- ☐ All first-time students
- ☐ First-time full-time students
- ☐ First-time part time students
- ☐ Ethnic minority students
- ☐ Female Only Students
- ☐ Male Only students
- ☐ Returning adult students
- ☐ Athletes
- ☐ Students without a high school diploma
- ☐ Students with low placement test scores
- ☐ "Generation 1.5" Students
- ☐ Students with developmental disabilities

Other, please specify

18. When is/are the student success course(s) offered at your college?
(Mark all that Apply)

- ☐ Before the start of fall semester
- ☐ First week of fall semester

☐ Sometime during the first or second month of fall semester

☐ During the first week of spring semester

☐ Sometime during the first or second month of spring semester

Other, please specify

19. What is the duration of the student success course(s)?

Contact hours	
ICCB assigned Course Number (CIPP)	
Hours students work outside of the program to meet requirement	
Other, please explain for clarification	

20. Which placement test is the college using for entering students into success course(s)?

--

21. Are specific scores used to designate which students must take the college success courses?

☐ Yes

☐ No

22. Briefly explain:

--

23. Are student generally retested after completing success course(s)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

24. Briefly explain:

--

25. Which of the following modalities are used in your college's student success course(s)?
(Mark all that apply)

- ☐ Face-to-Face (traditional class room)
- ☐ Online interaction
- ☐ Blended Learning
- ☐ Computer assisted learning (simulations, virtual labs, automated tutorials, etc.)
- ☐ Social networking technologies (such as Face book, Twitter)

Other, please specify

26. Please indicate ALL the subjects covered in success course(s)?

- ☐ Study Skills
- ☐ Math Review
- ☐ Writing Review
- ☐ Time Management
- ☐ Introduction to College Services (Advising, Financial Aid, Campus Security, etc.)
- ☐ Test Taking Skills
- ☐ Stress management
- ☐ Setting a personal academic plan
- ☐ How to outline readings and take notes in class
- ☐ Introduction to college's web-based educational platform (such as Blackboard)
- ☐ Understanding personal learning style
- ☐ Introduction to library services
- ☐ Introduction to tutoring center
- ☐ College activities for student life (sports, student paper, music, art, etc)

Other, please specify

27. What departments participated with the development, implementation, teaching, in or the assessment of your college's student success course(s)?

(Please Mark All that Apply)

Departments	Responsibilities			
	Development and Design	Implement, coordination and Support	Instructing	Assessment and Evaluation
Advising and Counseling				
Math				
Language Arts				
Career Development				
Student Affairs				
Library				
Other, please specify				

28. To complete this research, I am inviting individuals to share their perceptions and experiences in an interview. Would you be willing to participate in a face-to-face interview at your campus? If so, please provide the following contact information.

Name:
Email:
Phone:

Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to complete this questionnaire. Your careful responses will provide substantive depth and clarity to this study and will aid in providing necessary context.

Contact information for the Researcher is:

Brenda Roland,
 Doctoral Student
 National Louis University
 P.O. Box 1266
 Matteson, IL 60443
broland@jjc.edu
 815-280-1323

Contact information for the Dissertation Chair:

Dr. Rebecca S. Lake
 National Louis University, Chicago Campus
 122 South Michigan Avenue
 Chicago, IL 60603
rebecca.lake@nl.edu
 312-261-3534

Appendix B

Interview Questions Mapped to Guiding Questions

Guiding Questions	Interview Questions
1. What catalysts were and are instrumental in the implementation of the college success course(s) instituted by the college?	Would you describe the college success course(s) at your institution? What are the primary catalysts for establishing a college success course(s) at your college?
2. How were the overall design and the components college success course(s) selected?	What information or data was involved in the design of the college success course(s)? Who was involved in designing the course(s)? What exactly are the components or modules of the college success course(s)?
3. How and in what way does the college success course(s) maintain quality and viability?	How often do you assess the success course(s)? What are the methods used for assessment? Who is involved in the assessment?
4. How is the impact of the college success course(s) evaluated and demonstrated?	What metrics or means are used by the college to demonstrate the college courses? Over the last few years, what changes have been made as a result of these findings? Based on “Lessons learned” from running the college success program, at your institution, what would you change in your current course(s) to improve it?

Appendix C:

Participants Consent Form

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study that will take place from October 2012 through October 2013. This form outlines the purposes of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

I consent to participate in a research project conducted by Brenda Roland, a doctoral student at National Louis University, located in Chicago, Illinois.

I understand the study is entitled *Race for Completion: Components of Success Course(s) Fostering Successful Completion of Community College*. The purpose of this study is to identify the components of first-year first-semester college success courses specifically designed to foster student success in Illinois single-campus community.

I understand that my participation will consist of audio recorded interviews lasting 60 to 90 minutes with a possible second, follow-up interview lasting 60 to 90 minutes. I understand that I will receive a copy of my transcribed interview at which time I may clarify information.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time until the completion of the dissertation.

I understand that my anonymity will be maintained and the information I provide confidential. I understand that only the researcher, Brenda Roland, will have access to a secured file cabinet in which will be kept all transcripts, audio recordings, documents and field notes from the interview(s) in which I participated.

I understand there are no anticipated risks or benefits to me, no greater than that encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study could be used to assist administrators in the identification of emerging academic support issues; in addition the evidence based research can be used as guidance for the increase of college completion rates.

I understand that in the event I have questions or require additional information I may contact the researcher: Brenda Roland, 214 N Ottawa St. Joliet, IL. 60432. Phone: 815-280-1323 or E-mail: broland@jjc.edu.

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that you feel have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact my Primary Advisor and Dissertation Chair: Dr. Rebecca S. Lake, National Louis University (Chicago Campus), 122 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60603. Phone: 312-261-3534 or E-mail: rebecca.lake@nl.edu

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D

Appendix D: Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement

This confidentiality form articulates the agreement made between Brenda Roland, the researcher, and Kandyce Peterson, R Square (DBA Datagain).

I understand and acknowledge that by transcribing the audiotapes provided to me by Brenda Roland, I will be exposed to confidential information about the research study and the research participants. In providing transcription services, at no time will I reveal or discuss any of the information to which I have been exposed.

In addition, at no time will I maintain copies of the electronic or paper documents generated. Further, upon completing each transcription, I agree to provide the electronic and paper documents to the researcher:

Brenda Roland

214 N Ottawa St. Joliet, IL. 60432

Phone: 815-280-1323

E-mail: broland@jjc.edu

I understand that breach of this agreement as described above could result in personal and professional harm to the research participants for which I will be held legally responsible.

Transcriptionist's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____